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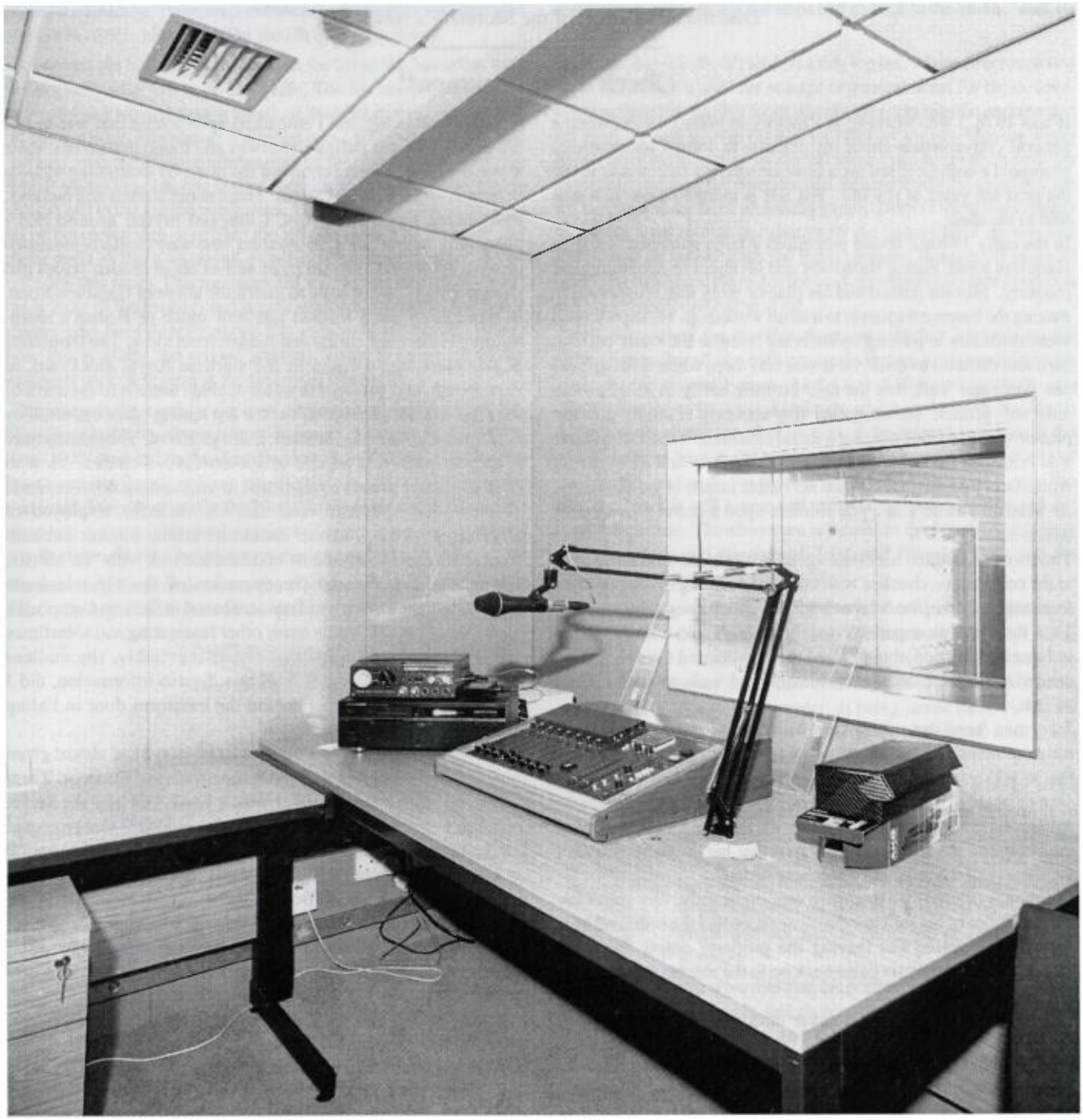

Cultybraggan RGHQ - BBC Studio

Subterranea Britannica
www.subbrit.org.uk

Subterranea Britannica is a society devoted to the study of man-made and man-used, underground structures and the archaeology of the Cold War. The main focus of interest is on abandoned and forgotten structures and, in the case of Cold War structures, studies are entirely confined to declassified and decommissioned structures.
The society is open to all and its membership includes all walks of life. Members are invited to contribute to this newsletter even if this just means sending very welcome snippets from newspapers and magazines.

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Check That Basement!

It was 1978. I was working at a factory in West London when a general conversation about my interest in things underground prompted a college to tell me a fascinating story that was to shape the next ten years of my life. His tale is related below as it was told to me then...

In the early 1970s a friend purchased a large detached house in Hamilton Road, Ealing Broadway and set about re-decorating the property. Months passed and his plan of work had progressed to making the basement room in to a small workshop. He experienced some difficulty in putting up shelving because the walls were so hard and difficult to drill. So it was odd then, when drilling in to one particular wall, that the drill bit sank easily in to what was only soft plaster. Investigating this anomaly revealed that the plaster was a façade covering a metal structure. When the plaster was removed the original wall was uncovered and this was set with a heavy metal door that had no visible means of gaining entry. So what do you do when you stumble upon a secret door in your basement?

The owner consulted his estate agent, wrote to his solicitor, spoke to the neighbours, checked with the local planning office and even featured his find in the local newspaper. All this revealed nothing. Then there was an apparent breakthrough. A man who purported to have information about "The Door" contacted the owner. He needed to see the basement for himself and made an appointment to visit.

Two men kept the appointment and despite making several measurements and taking a photograph, they gave nothing away that would shed light on the mystery. They left and were never seen or heard of again. Next day, however, a courier delivered an enveloped marked: "On Her Majesty's Service". The owner of the Hamilton Road house discovered that his property was now the subject of a compulsory purchase order.

The money offered by The Crown was, apparently, very generous. On the advice of his solicitor the owner accepted the order, without appeal, and moved out leaving the property empty for some months. Later the house came back on to the market and was sold to private ownership.

The friend of the storyteller never discovered what lay behind "The Door".

I was left both tantalised and yet frustrated. Should I accept the tale to be true? I decided after some soul searching that it was worth investigating and I embarked upon a hunt that was to last ten years. I visited Ealing Broadway and found that no one knew about the door. I then continued the quest by examining records in Britain and the United States. I read about tunnels and bunkers, I examined maps and plans, I dragged myself around many potentially "secret" sites, I met others who were similarly interested or were just weird. I heard more stories about hidden places and strange goings on but none to match the allure of Hamilton Road. In those ten years I learned just how much of Britain's recent military history lay buried and hidden from view. The thousands of homeless that worked in the wartime Royal Dockyard, at Portsmouth, and yet lived in miles of chalk tunnels to the north of the City. The hidden location of the last resting-place of Bletchley Park's most senior code breaker: Dillwyn Knox. The manufacture of aircraft parts in a myriad of subterranean factories. How to deny an enemy access to oil stored in vast underground caverns. To know when a covered water reservoir was in fact employed for other uses. The wartime communications bunker beneath Wentworth Golf Club and its odd landline link with "St. Moritz, Windsor". I evidenced the operation of the old telephone preference system, that was later confirmed in Duncan Campbell's book "War Plan UK", plus many other fascinating and sometimes unbelievable facts, half-truths and, inevitably, the endless speculation. So, in amongst all this diverse information, did I actually find out what lay behind the basement door in Ealing Broadway?

Ten years after hearing the Hamilton Road story I had almost given up on the possibility of ever solving the mystery of the Door. Then, out of the blue, a line in Nigel West's book: "GCHQ the Secret Wireless War 1900-86" revealed what lay hidden in that protected basement room in Ealing Broadway. Added to West's description of how the basement of Electra House, in London, was used to access overseas cable traffic was the revelation that behind the basement door at 12 Hamilton Road was a "standby cablehead and radio station". He notes that this secret facility was called in to service only once, on 16 August 1940, after the main eavesdropping site had been bombed. There is, unfortunately, no explanation as to how it came to be hidden behind a plaster façade and forgotten for the next 30 years.

So, if you need to sell your home quickly, better take another close look at the basement.

Neil C

Newsletters of Subterranea Britannica are published by the committee of Subterranea Britannica. Original articles , book reviews, press cuttings, extracts from books and journals, letters to the editor etc. are welcome. However the editor reserves the right not to publish material without giving a reason.

The committee of Subterranea Britannica and the editor do not necessarily agree with any views expressed and cannot check the accuracy of any material sent in.

Visit to Eton College fallout shelter

On 10th October 2000 Nick Catford, Keith Ward and myself visited what must be one of the most unusual places ever for a nuclear bunker: beneath Eton College near Windsor.

The bunker is set beneath one of the many college buildings and I found out about it through a personal contact. After lengthy negotiations the college finally agreed to a visit.

Constructed in 1959 by H D Bowyer of Slough the bunker is sited underneath one of the Boys' houses and was constructed as an integral part of the building. There are 3 entrances to the bunker via staircases and the bunker is also served by the lift for that building.

We entered the building and then took the lift to the basement with the engineer who was to be our guide. The list opens out onto the main corridor which runs the length of the bunker and all rooms are off this corridor. The bunker is divided into 2 sections - 'public' and 'private' with the lift shaft almost right on the dividing line. Leaving the lift we are in a concrete walled corridor, to the right is the private section and to the left the public area. We turn right and pass through an ordinary wooden door into the private area. The corridor and room walls in this area are all painted cream. Immediately on our left is the first room. This measures 3M x 2.5M and is totally stripped (as is most of the bunker) and is now used for storage by the house master who lives directly above this section of the bunker (hence how this is called the private section). There are vents from the extensive air con system at the far end of this room.

Returning to the corridor we continue along and on our right is a blast door made by Haywards of Borough, London SE1 with the date '1959' stamped on the identification plate. This door was locked but as we later found out leads into the current boiler room (more on that later). Directly opposite this blast door is a conventional wooden door into a room. This door was locked and the room contained a small wine collection belonging to the house master.

Further along the corridor turns sharp left and there is a room 3m x 3m on the right hand side. In the ceiling of this room is the large emergency escape hatch which opens into the car park above. Or rather would if it had not been covered in tarmac outside!!!

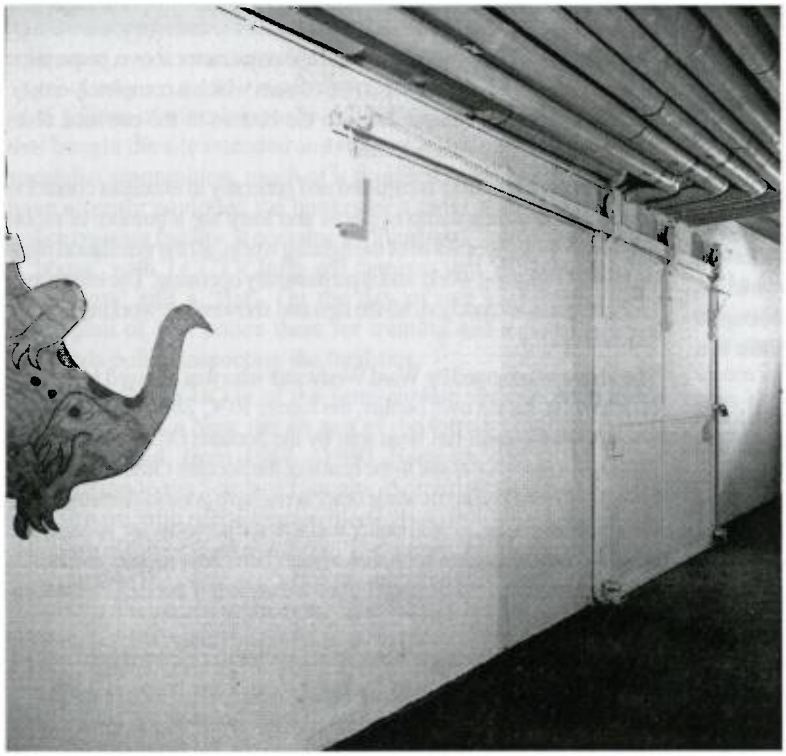
Just past this room on the right is one of the staircases. This has a double dog leg and leads up to a locked internal door which leads directly into the house masters living accommodation. Directly opposite the staircase is another room 4m x 2m which again is used for storage by the house master.

All along the corridor and in each of the rooms are vents from the air con system. Let's retrace our steps and go back to the 'public' section of the bunker.

Directly opposite the lift shaft is a dog leg into a bare concrete room 4m x 3m which is used for storage of general items for the college. We concluded that as this room was directly opposite the unprotected lift shaft the dog leg was built in for blast protection. Moving along the corridor the next door on the left was a blast door which until the day of our visit had not been opened. Behind it was the generator for the bunker and the back up battery supply. Both of these were coated in a thick layer of dust but amazingly the battery back up was still active and on charge with the lights glowing beneath 20 years of dust. This room (and the rest of the bunker) were in excellent condition with no evidence of damp at all.

Continuing along the corridor there are a further 3 rooms on the right all 5m x 3m all of which are used for storage but are fitted with vents for the air con system. At the end of the corridor there is a double dog leg to the second staircase which again has a dog leg on it. This leads up into another section of the house via a door at the top. Returning back to the main corridor the room directly opposite the dog leg leading to the stairs is the power and air con room. The power system is still active and today supplies the bunker and the rest of the house. The air system is located at the far end of this very cramped room and consists of 2 fan and filtration units but the filtration appeared to be fairly basic.

Turning back towards the lift the final doorway on the right leads into a small corridor. This has a series of bays along it which used to have bunks in them and there are some bunk bed ends still in situ along with the maintenance materials being stored there. At the far end of this corridor is the final staircase which dog legs up to an external door.



Eton College Bunker - Original internal door

Directly opposite is the entrance to the boiler room which today houses an oil fired boiler (the original ran on Anthracite coal) and again has a lot of materials stored in it. There is a very interesting black plinth built into the floor in this room which obviously used to have something very big mounted on it but our guide was not able to enlighten us further on it's purpose.

We were told that the bunker was provided to house 48 people and those with places would have been the Provost and the fellows of the school. It was interesting to note that whilst there was a generator there was no running water or toilets but our guide informed us that the bunker was once fully equipped and even had tinned food in place although there is no kitchen as such. There is no suggestion that any young member of the royal family would have had a place in the shelter.

Andrew Smith

Visit to RGHQ 1.1 at Cultybraggan

On the 8th March a very small party from Subterranea Britannica visited Cultybraggan RGHQ one mile south of Comrie in Perthshire and fifteen miles north of Stirling. The bunker, which was only completed in 1990 as a replacement for Anstruther, is located within the Cultybraggan army training camp at NN768203. We had arranged to meet two officials from the Scottish Office (The Scottish equivalent of the Home Office) at noon but we arrived a little early to find the camp almost deserted. There was no guard on the gate so we drove in and in the camp office there was one man and his daughter who told us we could go anywhere on our own until the man from the Scottish Office arrived. The camp consists of little more than rows of WW2 Nissan Huts (It had been a prisoner of war camp) interspersed with a few small brick buildings. The bunker was obvious in the north east corner of the site. It is within its own fenced and locked compound. With a large aerial mast on the north side and a long brick ventilation/exhaust tower on the top. On the east side of the compound, and within the camp is the Comrie ROC Post. All surface features of the post are intact and in good condition as is the green paint. The hatch is locked.

The bunker is on two levels, the upper level being above ground but mounded over with soil and grassed. The main entrance is on the west side of the mound where a gas tight door leads into a lobby area with a door into the decontamination room and a second gas tight door into the bunker. The is also a a bullet proof glass panel looking into a guard/ control room. Going through the gas tight door there are stairs to the left down to the lower level and a door into the control room. In the room there is a large electrical panel with the controls for the bunker including fire protection, intruder alarm and controls for the filters and ventilation plant. The panel is still functioning. There are also two key cabinets full of keys. Beyond the control room the next door on the right leads into a small preparation room and then into the decontamination room where there are three shower blocks (the showers still work) with a door at the other end back into the entrance lobby. Returning to the top of the stairs, a short passages opens into a large open plan office area running two thirds the length of the bunker and across two thirds of the width. This area has been completely stripped of everything. There is a concertina patrician across the back third of the room and this are appears to have been used as a conference room. On the left (north) side of this room is a long thin room with evidence that it had contained tele-printers and next to that a small tea room with evidence that a tea making machine had stood there. From the back of the conference room a passage leads to the upper plant room, passing a second stairway down on the right and the emergency exit. The upper plant room contains all the ventilation plant with its associated control cabinets plus two air compressors for pumping out the sewage. All the plant is still operating and every time a toilet was flushed one of the compressors would start. There is a well down to the lower plant room with a hoist on the east side of the room and through a door on the north side, behind some of the ventilation plant there is a ladder down to the lower plant room.

On the right (south) side of the large open plan office/conference room there are doors into approximately 8 square rooms some of which are used by Cultybraggan Camp for storage. One room however contains a number of brand new telex machines, some of them still in their original packing crates. Apparently some of these machines, and their monitors have gone to Anstruther Museum.

Returning to the entrance area and descending the stairs. There is a long corridor straight ahead with dormitories left and right, all these rooms are now empty. At the end of the corridor there is a cross passage, turning right leads into a store room while straight on leads to the bottom of the second stairway and then into the lower large plant room plant room which contains a long water tank and the ventilation plant, all of which is functioning. A door at the far end leads into the standby generator room with two large diesel generators still in place. A door from this room leads to the generator exhaust and up into the ventilation tower.

Returning to the cross passage there is a door to the right with a combination lock on it, this was the strong room. A short corridor then leads to a second cross passage. A door to the rights leads into the BBC Studio which is kept locked at all times. The door opens into the control room which is approximately 25' X 25' in size and lined with acoustic sheeting. The studio itself which is about 8' X 8' stands in the opposite corner. There are two floor standing racks on wheels, one has a stack of control units including a large jack panel. The other rack contains two Technics tuners the remote controls for which were found, still in their plastic bags, in a filing cabinet. There are also two private wires to radio repeater stations in the locality. There is a red light above the door into the studio which contains a chair, a custom made mixing desk, a Technics cassette player, a UHER portable reel to reel tape recorder (there is a tape on it which has a series of tines on it) and an AKG D202 microphone. There is a glass panel looking into the control room. All the equipment in the studio is still functioning and the private lines to the radio repeaters are still live.

Turning right out of the studio leads to the BT room. In the centre of the room is a faraday cage containing the MSX (2000?) exchange equipment with UPS power supply. There are racks of private wires and a programming terminal. There is a small room next to it containing two operators positions still in place. Next door to the BT room was the radio room with a large floor standing rack that had once contained all the radio equipment. The various receiver and transmitter units from the rack lie on the floor in an adjacent room.

Opposite the BT room a door leads into the medical room where there are two beds, a moveable screen and a door leading into a toilet and washroom. Returning to the second cross passage another long corridor gives access to three more dormitories on the left hand side which still contain all their twin bunks and on the right hand side first the gents toilets with all the usual facilities, (WC, urinals and showers). Next to the gents toilets are two was rooms with sinks and the plumbing and notices for a KEF washer and tumble drier and a washing up machine and then the ladies toilets. The final room at the end of the corridor is the canteen with hot plate which is rather corroded and an extractor above, preparation area and sinks. This opens out into the canteen which is completely empty. The door from the canteen leads to the bottom of the entrance stairs which has a storage area beneath.

Throughout, the bunker is carpeted and generally in excellent condition although it is a little damp in places and there are a number of rabbit carcasses on the floor. Most of the lighting works, all the ventilation plant and air conditioning works and is permanently operating. The telephones and intercoms all function, all the taps and showers are working and the toilets flush.

The visit was arranged by Ward Westwater who was allowed to remove certain items for his own bunker, the former ROC 28 Group Control at Dundee. The bunker has been sold by the Scottish Office to the MOD although at present it is still in the hands of the Scottish Office. The Army have removed some items while other items have gone to Anstruther. As the army have keys to the bunker and use some rooms for storage, the BBC studio and control room has always been kept locked as it is still fully equipped and the Scottish Office are unclear if the BBC want their equipment back.

Also present were Caroline Westwater, Dan McKenzie and Nick Catford (A 950 mile round trip from Swanley Kent. I left home at 3 am and arrived home at 11 p.m. having spent three hours at the bunker) My thanks to Ward for arranging the visit and for the Scottish Office for being so accommodating. **Nick Catford 9.3.2000**

Visit to ROC 15 Group HQ at Fiskerton, Lincolnshire

On the 17th February, 4 members of Subterranea Britannica, Nick Catford, Dan McKenzie, Andrew Smith & Tony Page visited the former ROC 15 Group Headquarters/UKWMO Sector Control at Fiskerton to conduct a photographic survey.

The site was acquired by its present owners in 1998 after laying idle Since 1992 when it was vacated by members of the ROC and the UKWMO. In 1998 the site was heavily overgrown, the surface administration buildings had been badly vandalised and the bunker, although still secure was partially flooded on the lowest level and was very damp. Although the water has now been pumped out it has proved impossible To plug the leaks and in wet conditions up to 45 gallons of water have to be pumped out per day. The company that bought the site intended and still use it for the manufacture of specialist ammunition, much of it supplied to the police and they have recently equipped the bunker as a rapid intervention skills police training facility. It contains 20 'furnished' rooms comprising a 'house' with 7 CCTV Infra-red cameras and VCR facilities, a 'bungalow' and a 'flat'. On the day of our visit there was a contingent of Met police there for training and a party of West Midlands police inspecting the facilities.

ROC Group HQ Fiskerton

The ROC Group HQ is of the semi-sunken variety, opening in 1960. This Was a New site on part of the former RAF Fiskerton. The group had, from 1947 - 1960, Been located within RAF Waddington to the South of Lincoln. Administration was located in a purpose built prefabricated block alongside with a long brick Building that was used as a store. The admin. block has now been renovated as the company's offices with changing and debriefing rooms for the police at the rear. The bunker is covered with turf (and mole hills) with the emergency exit facing onto the road and a small entrance block, painted green, at the far end. There is a pump up aerial mast alongside the entrance and a GZI mounting on the roof of the block. On top of the turf there is a FSM & BPI mounting and close to the emergency exit a standard ROC underground post entrance hatch. This was the original emergency exit which would have involved the use of a ladder but this was replaced by the current emergency exit when the centre was modernised.

Going through the entrance door there is a short corridor with the filter room on the right hand side and a decontamination (stripped out) room on the left hand side. Straight ahead were the three water tanks, two have been removed leaving a drop to the second level where a certified shackle point has been installed for abseiling. The stairs down to this level are to the left. At the bottom of the stairs a short passage leads round a corner to the main spine corridor running the length of the bunker and out through the emergency exit. The first room on the left contains the sewage pumps, mounted below floor level with a metal grille covering them. The female and male toilets follow. The female toilets have been stripped out but the male toilets have been left intact for police training although as there is no longer a water supply to the bunker they no longer function. The male and female dormitories are also on the left hand side and these have been stripped out and converted into multiple rooms.

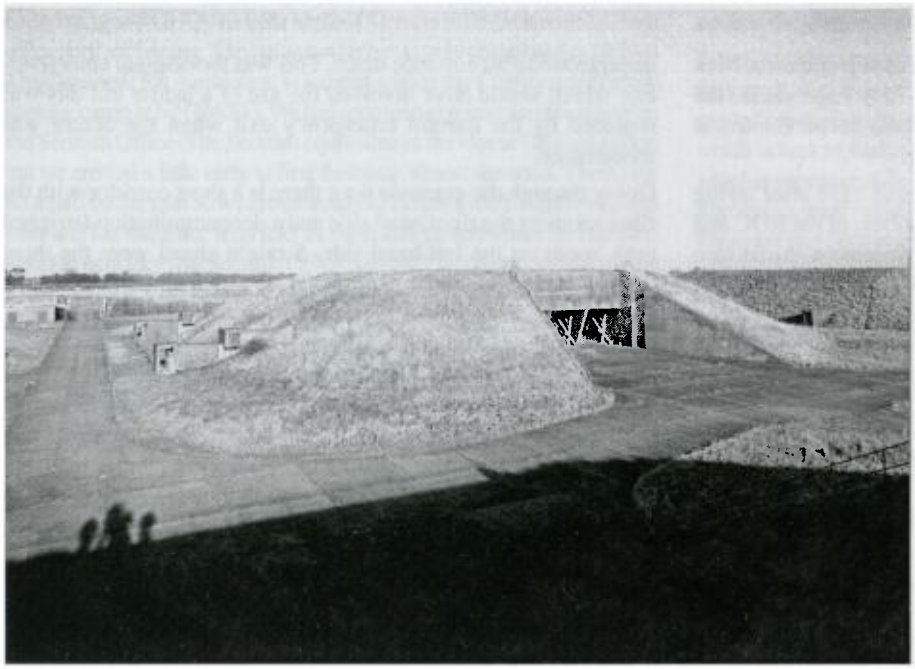
The first room on the right hand side is the plant from. Some of the ventilation plant is intact but new trouncing has been installed in this room as the system has been reversed and is now used for extraction. Original ventilation trunking is still retained throughout the rest of the bunker. The compressors are all intact on the opposite side of the room. At the far end a door leads into the stand by generator room. Unfortunately the generator was sold in 1998. The next room is the kitchen which still retains most of its appliances with a serving hatch into the canteen which has now been divided up into a number of training rooms. At the far side of the former canteen are steps down to the lowest level. Returning to the main corridor the next room is the BT equipment room followed by the original control room consisting of an upper gallery around three sides of the well. When the centre was modernised a false floor was constructed across the gallery and a new control room added at the lowest level. This false floor has now been removed and the two storey 'house' now stands in this area. At the far side of the gallery is a second set of steps down into what was the new control room. This is a long room which an officers room at the far end. It has now been divided into two long thin rooms, one containing a training rig allowing up to five doors to be breached in succession and the other a firing range for testing the ammunition manufactured on the site.

Although the owners allowed this visit and photographs to be taken they have stressed that they would not welcome further visits and have even turned down a request for a visit by a group of former local ROC members at the request of the police and the council.

A large blue UKWMO sign which used to stand at the entrance to the site now hangs on the wall in the board room.

Nick Catford 18.2.2000

Visit to RAF Greenham Common



Greenham, Common - missile silo

On 21st January Dan McKenzie, Richard Challis, Andrew Smith & Nick Catford visited the former US air base at Greenham Common, in Berkshire

Greenham was abandoned many years ago and the site is now part business park with the rest being returned to common land. The runway has been removed and the last part of the hard standing area for aircraft was being dug out whilst we were there. Many new buildings have been built to provide accommodation for a variety of businesses but a large number of the original structures remain.

We started at the Command centre which was exactly the way it was left when the US pulled out all those years ago. The building is part of the IMF Treaty and as such must be left in this condition until May 2001.

We were shown around the building by a member of staff from the Greenham Trust and were free to photograph what ever we liked.

We entered a conventional office building (which was being refurbished) and walking down a short corridor we came to the blast door which was the entrance to the (modestly) fortified part of the building. We were now standing at one end of a very long corridor. All rooms in the bunker were off this corridor apart from the air plant room and decontamination centre. More on those later. We walked to the far end of the corridor and worked our way back.

We started in the command room itself (at the far end of the corridor) which still had the moving wall boards in place. The room is rectangular with the boards mounted along one (long) side. The entrance to the room is down a few steps and is directly opposite the wall boards. There are 2 security doors leading into the command area which had 2 rooms behind it which acted as galleries. These doors provided an 'airlock' system and whilst strengthened and fitted with toughened glass did not appear to offer much in the way of blast resistance. Entry through these doors was controlled by numeric keypads. At one end of the command room was an escape hatch. This led directly to the outside and demonstrated how the walls were just 2 foot thick offering limited blast protection. Our guide informed us how the sole purpose of this room was to get the final launch codes to the missile trailers once received from the US command. All targets were already programmed into the missiles and the fissile material was (according to our guide) already in the missiles.

The floor throughout the building was a raised computer type and there were lots of cable trays in place. Directly behind the Command Room were 2 smaller rooms which had darkened windows looking out onto the wall boards. Walking back up the corridor the next accessible room was a former telephone room. The US didn't trust BT and brought in their own telecomms equipment which was housed in this room. Some of the racks remained but were stripped of cards etc. The fire extinguishing system was Halon and in many of the rooms were 'Halon gas abort' buttons to stop the discharge of Halon in those rooms.

Behind this room was the comms room for the telephone system. There was some paperwork left in this room which indicated that there had been direct telephones to other military bases occupied by the US in Britain and to other British/Nato command bunkers. Some of the flooring was removed in this room and allowed us to see some of the cable trays etc. Along one wall was the mounts for the phone wire looms for patching and routing. Directly off this room was a small room containing a large number of high power lead acid batteries. This was the standby power for the phone system.

Across the corridor was the air plant room and decontamination centre. The air plant room was one of 4 plant rooms and contained the aircon and filtering system for the bunker. This was in reasonable working order (our guide powered a lot of it up - a bit noisy at points) and there were a large number of Oxygen cylinders in a rack. These were for use if the outside vents needed to be closed due to Napalm attack, high levels of radiation etc and would provide oxygenation for the bunker.

Just down from this plant room was a hot water boiler and storage tank in a small separate room. Then we came to the decontamination centre.

This was a very interesting facility. In the event of war the blast door at the far end of the corridor would have been sealed from the inside and the only way in or out would have been through this facility which led to the outside through a series of blast doors and a turnstile.

At the entrance to this area was a control panel which was fully functioning as indeed were most facilities within this area. The control panel provided remote door operation between the various sections of the decontamination area.

I'll describe this area in 2 sections - leaving the bunker and entering the bunker.

To leave the bunker you would gain access from the control panel area in to a secure corridor which led to the room for putting on a NBC suit. From here you would follow the blue arrows painted on the floor to a blast door that led to an airlock. Go through the blast door and there are fold up benches along one side of the air lock room. Another blast door leads from the airlock to the outside. Directly beyond this blast door is a security turnstile and small guardroom to control access to the airlock.

Our guide informed us that the US had an armed soldier permanently stationed in full NBC gear during exercises in the airlock room with another colleague outside in similar attire.

To enter the bunker you would pass through the turnstile and enter the airlock room. You would then go through a separate blast door into a foot bath area where there is a large, deep trough in the floor which had a high pressure water jet in it to blast off chemical contaminant etc from the lower area of the suit. Next was a large bin full of powder which would be sprinkled on the suit to dry up any chemical contaminant. Then it was on to the radiation monitoring room. This had a built in shower for removing dust and contaminant etc. Next came NBC suit removal room where the suit was passed through a steel hatch into a 'dirty room' for it to be cleaned and re-used of possible. This room also had radiation monitoring and was equipped with showers for personal washing. Next was the drying room which still had a notice on the wall asking servicemen to 'take one towel and dry off then dress using available clothes and return to work area.' The door from this area led back to the control panel. The control panel could fully lock all doors in the decontamination area and intercoms were provided for communication with each room. A full PA system (which still worked) was also available in this part of the bunker.

Returning to the main corridor.....

The next room on the left was a large empty room with an escape hatch and a safe door leading to a strongroom. Purpose of this room is unknown but it was stripped of everything. It could have been a dormitory but there was no evidence of this.

Next on the right were more plant rooms. these 3 rooms were all interconnected and formed the remainder of this side of the bunker. The first was power management and pump control. This seemed to be the main control area for the bunker infrastructure and the panel still lit up. Most of the plant still functioned our guide told us but it cost in the region of 800 an hour to run so was only turned over once a month. Off this room was the air intake room which had a large number of ducts and high power fans. Another escape door led to the outside world. Beyond this room was a small plant room containing the emergency generator which could provide 500Kw of power.

On the other side of the corridor were the toilets and an additional plant room with compressors and air circulation units. We were now back at the blast door at the top end of the corridor.

One interesting feature of this bunker was the still working pneumatic tube massage carrying system. From the outside it was difficult to tell that the building was indeed fortified.

Alongside was the old armoury which now houses an archive storage company. We were not able to visit this building.

On the way out we drove past the former VMF (Vehicle Maintenance facility). This is also and IMF Treaty listed building but were unable to visit it as it is in a locked compound. The key is held under IMF conditions in a locked and sealed bag and we had no authorisation to enter this area.

We then proceeded to the missile silos.....

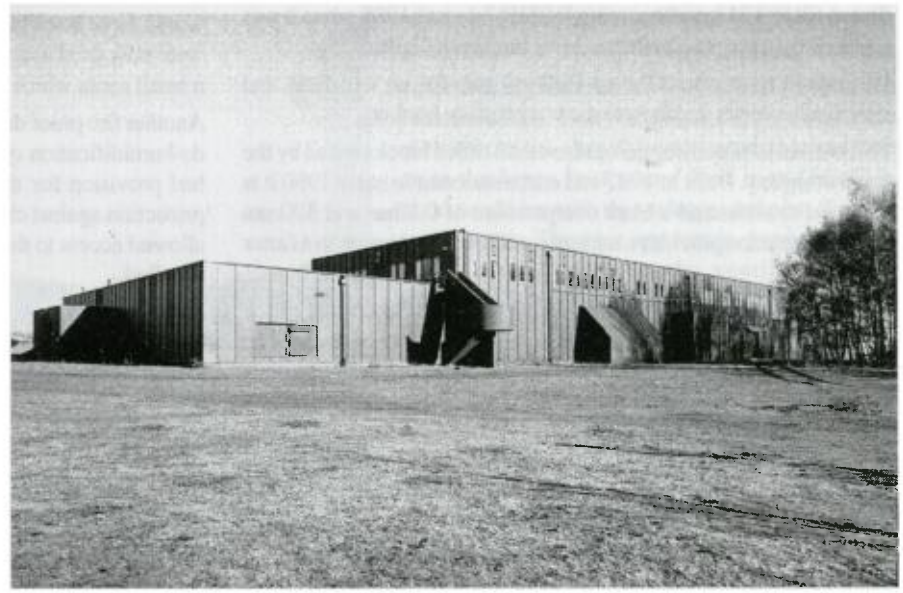
These were in a separate part of the air base and again are listed under the IMF treaty. We were extremely lucky to get to visit them.

A total of 96 missiles were stationed at Greenham and there were 6 of these silos. The silos are built on the surface and have huge lowering doors which seal the ends of the silos. They are fully drive in drive out. All the doors are now fixed in the down position and apart from one of the silos the hydraulic rams have been removed. We're not sure why just one set remain but they rams are fully lubricated and protected with bubble wrap and overtubing. This could be something to do with the IMF treaty. The hydraulic system was still in place on all the silo walls together with the instructions for operating them. Many features remain including telephone handset boxes and part of the electrical installation. All silos are identical apart from one which had a different personnel access.

We moved on to the guardhouse which still sits by the multiple gates which were used for entry. This building remains in tact but is empty. The windows were heavily reinforced and the building appears to have some blast protection. A personnel turnstile for entry on foot still exists but does not work.

Continuing on we visited the other buildings on the site some of which were open for us to look in. All were empty. Earlier in the day our guide had informed us that the Russians still visit the site a couple of times a year for inspection purposes. One of these buildings had a rack for M16 rifles standing by the door. We were not able to ascertain the purpose of many of these buildings but many were large enough for medium size vehicle access. The internal doors were in tact on one of these buildings. We continued back past the silos to where we had left the cars.

Andrew Smith



Greenham Common -.Command centre

Visit to Ullenwood AAOR and water utility bunker near Gloucester

23rd January saw a group of 12 Sub Brit members visit the AAOR at Ullenwood and a water utility bunker near Gloucester which was excellently organised by SB member Peter Turier.

Duly assembled we left for Ullenwood. This site is currently used by Gloucestershire Fire Service as a training centre and by Gloucestershire Trading Standards as a storage facility.

This bunker is identical to other AAOR sites such as Vange and Mistley.

It is however in excellent condition throughout. Upon entering through the blast doors we descended the stairs on the left to the generator room. This is completely in tact with everything as it should be - even the control panel. The ground floor contained a large number of rooms and moving along the corridor we came to the air plant room and then on to the boiler room.

Much of the electrical system worked so we had electric light in most rooms.

Carrying on with our exploration of this floor we visited all rooms apart from the central ops room which was securely locked as Trading Standards are using it as a store. Some of the rooms had ROC post maps on the walls and in one room was a copy of the Glos. County Council emergency telephone directory together with a plan of the emergency telephone system for the county.

On the upper floor we were able to access the gallery areas and most of the rooms. The Glos. RAYNET organisation have got use of some of the rooms and have installed a small comms centre in the old teleprinter room. They also have a workshop and store facilities in the bunker.

Most of the original features were still in tact including the curved Perspex in the gallery viewing windows. The toilet areas had been renovated to provide full shower facilities for the Fire Fighters The entire bunker was clean and showed little sign of deterioration. Externally an additional door had been added to provide a small hallway just outside the blast doors. The Napalm dampers were still in place on the air vents. The outside structure appeared in good condition. The bunker is set in its' own compound within the site and is totally secure.

Following it's use as an AAOR the bunker found a new lease of life first as SRHQ 71 later becoming RGHQ 7.1 until 1985 when it was replaced by a purpose built two level bunker at Chilmark.

We moved on to the 'Cheese Rollers' pub for an excellent and inexpensive lunch and then to the water utility bunker.

This bunker is directly underneath a small office block owned by the water company. Built in 1987 and commissioned in early 1990 it is designed to withstand a blast overpressure of 0.1 bar and 300mm thick construction provides a minimum radiation protection to a factor of 100.

We entered the building via a standard door and descended to the basement level. As we came down the stairs there were 2 blast protected hatches in the wall which provided access to the vent/air intake shaft which formed part of the wall of the building above. This wall had a large vent visible on the outside at 2nd floor level. We turned right at the bottom of the stairs to be greeted by the first of a series of blast doors. We went through this door into a small airlock which had a door in front of us into the decontamination area. A blast door on the left led into the generator plant room which had a 5000 litre oil tank. There were 2x27KVa 415 volt 3 phase generators in full working order. Each generator is capable of powering the bunker at full load. Remote control of both these generators was provided by control panels in the dining area of the bunker. A fuel filling point is provided on the outside corner of the building at surface level.

Going through the next door in the airlock we come to the decontamination room which is divided into 3 areas.

The first is for the removal of contaminated clothing which according to the bunker operations manual (which was available for us to look at) was to be stored in sealed plastic sacks in this area. Next was a small decontamination shower fed from a small water tank by gravity feed. This tank could be refilled from the main bunker water tanks by a manual pump. The final area was for drying and dressing. Going through another blast door we entered the main area of the bunker which was to be used as a dining area. To the left were male toilets which was fitted with a single shower and a single urinal. The bunker ops manual indicated that there was provision for the installation of 2 chemical or dry bag cubicles. Next to this were the female toilets which had just a single shower and again there was provision for chemical/dry bag toilets in the manual. Waste water from both toilets and the kitchen area was fed into a 600 litre tank which could be pumped out to the surface via a semi rotary hand pump.

The next room off the main area was the kitchen. This was small and was fitted with a 1 hour rated fire door and had basic units in it. A small room off the kitchen housed the water tanks which held 10,000 litres of water which would allow 10 litres of water per person per day.

A corridor led down to 2 interconnected rooms that were to have been the dormitories. These rooms were now used as stores but the second had a blast door leading to the 2 emergency exits. Going through this door there was a steel staircase on the right which led up to a conventional fire exit door. Directly opposite when leaving the dormitory via the blast door was an escape tunnel approx 1000mm x 800mm. This led to a shaft which went up to a manhole cover in the car park of the building. Later investigation on the surface identified the relevant manhole cover. There was however a van parked on top of it!

Going back to the main area of the bunker another door led into the 2 communications rooms. These rooms were to have been used for control in the event of a nuclear attack. All the equipment was to have been moved down and plugged in and could be operated as it would have been in the surface control rooms. Both these rooms were now used as a gym. A further corridor off the main area led to a small room which was again used as a store.

Another fire proof door led into the air filtration room. The filtration/ de-humidification system could clean 3000cuM per hour of air and had provision for the installation of HEPA and carbon filters for protection against chemical or biological attack. A hatch in the wall allowed access to the filter room where the filters would have been installed.

The main ops manual was available for us to read and the bunker was designed to be ready in war time within 48 hours and would have supported 20 people for 30 days. It was designed to operate as a fully self contained unit.

Initially the bunker was stocked with food and supplies but this was stopped in 1995 but all support systems are maintained in full readiness as the generators also supply back up power for the 24hr control room in the building above. The utility company in question has a number of other bunkers which it is in the process of de-commissioning.

This bunker had extensive air ducting throughout for fresh air supply and was in excellent condition with many features.

Andrew Smith

Visit to 25 Group ROC HQ at Ayr - 10.2.2000

The owners of 25 Group HQ at Ayr, who are the local church, have decided that they have no use for the building and it should be demolished at the earliest opportunity to provide extra car parking space. In order to record the structure before demolition, a short notice visit was arranged by Sub Brit member Ward Westwater for the 10th February to record the structures and negotiate with the church the removal of any remaining artefacts before demolition.

The Group control is located at 17 Waterloo Road, Prestwick, a residential area at the rear of Sainsbury's Car Park. It consists of a small adapted house (with doors and windows now bricked up) and a prefabricated administration block now used as a nursery. The protected group control, which was opened in 1962. It is of the standard surface blockhouse design but unusually it's clad in square section corrugated metal sheeting and painted bright green. Externally it appears in excellent condition. There is an emergency exit at the western end, opposite Sainsbury's car park with the main entrance at the opposite end, along side the boarded up house. An open recessed entrance leads to two blast doors. That on the right, which could not be opened leads to the filter room while that on the left leads to the main spine corridor. Rooms on the left hand side were, in order, the decontamination room, dressing room, ladies toilet, men's toilet, officers room, male dormitory and female dormitory. All these rooms have been completely stripped apart from the officers room which has a large chart on one wall headed 'Control Logistics Tote' and 'Post Logistics Tote' with a lot of information relating to the running of the control centre. There was a map of Western Scotland showing the position of posts on the opposite wall. There is also a key cabinet congaing over 50 keys, presumably all from the centre. All the toilets were still functioning.

On the east side of the corridor the wall of the lobby area has been partially removed along with part of the wall into the first (plant room) room which has been cut away to allow the removal of the generator which was sold by the church shortly after they acquired the site. Much of the ventilation plant, which was installed shortly before stand down, has also been removed and sold although some of the older plant and filters are still intact. The main control panel in a floor standing cabinet is still intact and in use. At the back of the plant room another door leads into the generator room which is now being used as a store for redundant equipment from the centre. The generator control panel in a floor standing cabinet is still in place. There are several WB1401 speech receivers lying on the floor and a mass of paperwork referring to the plant and the general operation of the centre. All the Perspex map screens from the control room are also stacked in this room. Adjacent to the plant room is the two storey control room. This is strewn with rubbish and the partition wall with windows has been ripped out. On the gallery above a Bomb Power Indicator (BPI) is still in place on the wall with the bottom of the pipe for a Fixed Survey Meter (FSM). There is a large cluster map of Scotland alongside the BPI and another wall chart behind. On the opposite wall of the gallery is a rotating sign relating to the current status of the ventilation plant. At this upper level was the Coms room which is completely stripped and the tank room which is locked. Returning to the main corridor. After the control room there is a small store which is empty, stairs up to the gallery and BT equipment room which is locked. Apparently it has been stripped and is now used as a store. Next room is the canteen with its hatch into the kitchen. This has been used as a meeting room for a local drama group. Everything in the kitchen is intact. Beyond the kitchen a short passage to the right through two doors leads to the emergency exit.

Internally apart from the damage caused during the removal of the generator the structure of the building is sound with a little damp visible on some walls. The power is on throughout and the ventilation trunking is in place.

Ward Westwater suggested to the people from the Church that it might be worth considering other options for the building including lottery funding, but they said on moral grounds they would be unable to accept this.There did not seem to be any problem in removing all the remaining artefacts before demolition. Some items including the tables from the control room, were taken out shortly after the Church acquired the site and are now on display at the Anstruther museum.

ROC Group HQ Ayr

After leaving the site we took a brief look at the Prestwick ROC Post where only the base and some rubble from the aircraft post were visible and then on to the Joppa Post where there is an Orlit B in good condition with the underground post 40 yards to the south. The post appears in good condition with a metal dome on the ventilation shaft indicating it was a master post. The padlocks have been cut off by the farmer by the hatch is still locked from the inside. The remains of a key in the lock stopped us opening it with a 'T' bar. The farmer asked Ward if he was interested in buying the post.

Those present on the visit were Ward & Caroline Westwater, Dougie O'Hara, Nick Catford, Dan McKenzie and Richard Challis, all members of Subterranea Britannica.

Nick Catford

Visit to Cold War sites in Buckinghamshire

On the 23rd March 6 Sub Brit members visited no less than 6 sites in Buckinghamshire

We started at 10am in Beaconsfield with the Buckinghamshire County Council standby emergency control centre. This is located underneath the County Council offices in the town. Entry is through a gas proof door (which would also offer some blast protection) and then down a flight of steps. At the bottom of the steps you turn left are faced with a second gas/blast door directly in front of you and the gents toilets on your left. It is unusual to see that the gents toilets were outside the protected area and I questioned this with our guide who explained that if the bunker had been put into use then everyone would have shared the ladies toilets which were just inside the second gas/blast door on the left.

Going through this door you are now at the top of a long corridor which almost every room in the bunker led off.

Our guide explained that as the Emergency Planning dept had rates exemption on the bunker they were careful only to have civil emergency equipment in store. The local RAYNET (Radio Amateurs) and Bucks Light Rescue groups had some of their equipment stored there and used it as a base. There was obviously a well established rapport between these organisations and the County Council.

The first door on the right led into a medium sized room that had a few comfy chairs and a desk with the visitors log book and further information on RAYNET. In store here were a number of maps belonging to the Council.

A door from this room led into what was the communications room which housed the Faraday cage for telecoms and some of the RAYNET radio equipment. The original operator bays were still in place as were the 1960's lampshades above each position. A connecting door led into a large room which is currently used as a meeting area (More on this later). The whole bunker had a very authentic and original feel to it. A smaller room off this room housed further emergency equipment for RAYNET and the Light Rescue.

Back in the corridor the next door on the left led into the kitchen area. This was still used as a kitchen but had none of the original fixture or fittings. There was a small store off this room (full of cleaning equipment) and a second room which housed some of the original fittings of the bunker such as Bakelite ashtrays etc. There was no food stored there.

The next door on the right off the corridor led to a large room which is now being used as a conference room and is equipped with tables and chairs. A WB 1401 carrier receiver unit was still attached to the wall and was in excellent condition as indeed was all the bunker. This room had a further room off it which used to be the scientific officers room although now it was full of map holders (the maps being in one of the earlier rooms awaiting transfer).

On the other side of the corridor was the mess area. This has an escape hatch in the roof with a steel ladder leading up to it. Our guide informed us how the hatch came out in the ladies toilets in the building above!

At the end of the corridor was the main ops room and what a room this was.....

Entering in one corner of the room in front of us were a large number of steel frame beds neatly stacked against the wall together with the mattresses. Next to these were ex BT utilities emergency kits comprising of boxes of cutlery, plates, wash up kit etc enough in each box for one person for a month. On the wall were a number of charts and maps relating to civil defence including ROC post maps. Filing cabinets were full of paperwork relating to Civil Defence including the 'How to plot explosions on a Radiac map' reference books! There were also bomb blast meters and blast calculators stacked neatly in one corner. The WRVS and a charity doing collections for Bosnia had a small amount of kit stored.

A room off this room contained the fresh water tank and a substantial amount of 'field kitchen' type kit including storm lanterns and metal feeding stations.

This bunker was in it's original condition and as it is well concealed has suffered no vandalism. We have fully documented and photographed the bunker which is totally secure and alarmed.

Once outside we photographed the plant room complete with generator (which has a separate access) and blast covers on the numerous vents.

Duly satisfied that we had done a good job we all headed for Aylesbury and the main County Council Emergency Control Centre. This is located in a corner of one of the County Hall buildings and has moderate protection. Entry is gained through an unmarked door (again fully secure) and down a short piece of corridor. You then enter through a lightly protected gas/blast door and am at the top of a long corridor with the main bunker to the right. Straight ahead was a short piece of corridor which led to a gas/blast door beyond which was access to the rest of County Hall. Just before this blast door was a door on the left which leads into a small plant room containing the generator and fuel tank.

We retraced our steps and headed down the main corridor which was lined with galvanised steel fresh water tanks to the far end and turned left. Through a set of double swing doors was an exit door on our right which led up some steps into County Hall and a left shaft on our left. Both the exit door and lift shaft doors were protected.

Working back along the corridor the first room on the left was now a cleaning store. The next on the left was a general store for the Emergency Planning Dept and they had retained many cold war items including the 'mushroom cloud cut-outs' that would be drawn around on a wall chart to indicate bomb detonation.

We are now back the bottom of the long corridor. A door straight in front of us led into the old comms room which again had many original features including the individual bays. A further room off this led into the room which housed the Faraday cage for the BT lines (identical to the one at Beaconsfield). Moving up the corridor the next on the left was the main operations room. The whole facility is ready to go at a moments notice and is fully equipped with road maps, charts and OS maps of the County. Desks are laid out with stationery and telephones. Notices on the wall indicate private telephone numbers for the use of other services. Desk plates indicated positions for various Council Depts. and liaison officers from Fire, Police and Ambulance. Our guide explained how the bunker was still used today for civil emergencies such as flooding or severe storm damage. A small room off this Ops room housed a briefing area with video conferencing.

Next room on the left off the corridor was a store room that had various items in it including medical supplies and 3 hand cranked sirens one of which was still in its' wooden crate. The next room was now a briefing room but had off it a small plant room which controlled the fresh air circulation within the bunker.

We were extremely fortunate to gain access to these 2 facilities which are both still in use.

We went back to the cars and having stopped off for some lunch headed for a visit to the underground Grotto at Woodrow High House near Amersham. This is a single room Grotto which has the walls

decorated with pebbles set out in patterns relating to the legendary 'Hell Fire Club' from West Wycombe Caves. The Grotto has a hole in the roof to let light in and has a diameter of around 12 foot. It is not open to the public and again we were very fortunate to visit this site.

At this point we found ourselves ahead of schedule so decided to slot in an extra visit to the National Grid London Outer Ring Standby Control Centre which was nearby in a well concealed location. There was little to see from the fence (the site is unmanned but totally secure) so we left for Chiltern District Council and their ECC.

This is in the basement of the council offices and having met our guide he duly filled us in on some of the background of the site and his role. He was a former RAF Wing Commander who had joined the council in 1990 to write it's war plans! The bunker had been built in 1982 when the council offices were constructed and comprises of a series of room off a long corridor (can you see a pattern emerging here?). We entered through double swing doors in the basement area and immediately through these doors was a heavily re-enforced gas and blast door with 3 locks on it. We estimated this door weighed over a ton but could be pushed with one hand. We were now standing in a large room which would have become the dormitory area. A panel in the wall indicated an emergency escape route but our guide pointed out how the occupants of the bunker would need to hack there way (using the tools provided) through concrete and rubble in order to reach the escape shaft which led up into the pavement above. One wonders how long this would have taken and whether food supplies would have lasted out! Thoughts of the WW2 film 'The Great Escape' sprung to mind!

Moving along the corridor we were not able to access every room. At the far end was the old plant room which housed the now removed generator. A second blast door at the end of the corridor led into another section of the building. Walking back up the corridor on the right was the old kitchen which had a second escape tunnel out to the street. We were going to attempt to crawl down the tunnel but were not able due to the amount of junk piled up in the room. The whole bunker is currently used as a store and is packed with thousands of items and archive files.

Carrying back along the corridor were chemical toilets and then the former scientific advisors room which still had maps and charts on the wall. The next room was locked but the next was the old comms centre which had the Faraday cage for the BT kit (identical to the others).

Our guide explained how the bunker was designed to support the emergency team for 14 days. One of the current uses included training for the fire brigade on search and rescue as with the door closed and lights switched off the facility is totally light tight. Having taken another stack of photos we thanked our host and headed of to the old ROTOR station at RAF Chenies. This site looked completely abandoned although there was still a tall microwave tower towards the rear of the site. We were unable to tell if this was still in use. Clearly visable from the fence was the generator set houses and fuel tanks together with a small building with the sign 'Sewage Extractor' on it. This caused some debate amongst the group present as to why a surface radar station would have a sewage extractor? We came to the conclusion that this was the new National Seat of Government hence why it was all being kept in such a bad condition so as too fool us all. No doubt there is a 10 story bunker beneath the car parking area just inside the gate with enough supplies for 3000 people for 12 months. Somehow I don't think so.

Andrew Smith

Visit to Sopley Rotor station

On the 23rd of May a photographic trip was arranged to the Sopley Rotor Site in Hampshire. Unfortunately, at the request of the owners the visit was Only open to a very small party from Sub Brit consisting of Nick Catford & Dan McKenzie.

The Rotor Station is located at SZ163977 on the west side of a minor Road half a mile north of Sopley village. It is contained within a large Secure compound with a very low mound giving little evidence to the Unsuspecting passer by that there is a bunker beneath.

The guardhouse is not the standard bungalow design as it has an Overhanging flat roof, similar to that at Portland. The building is pained white. The only other buildings on the site are the former generator house alongside which has now been stripped out and is used as a garage and a small blockhouse near the south west corner of the compound which houses the emergency exit.

There is no indication on the property as to who owns it and what business is conducted there and at the request of the owners we cannot publish that information although I believe it is fairly common knowledge. We were allowed to see everywhere in the bunker below but were only allowed to photographs those areas and rooms that did not show any evidence of the business that was being conducted at the site.

Sopley was an R3 (two level) Ground Control Intercept station and was completed in April 1953.

We entered the bunker down a small stairway at the back of the guardhouse which leads to the top of the sloping 50 yard access tunnel into the bunker. At the bottom of this tunnel the corridor goes round a Z bend containing two blast doors to the main upper spine corridor. Just before the Z bend is one of the two main transformers which is now out of use and the original 1950's intercom system which is working and used by the owners. At this point is the main stairway down to the lower level with its hoist Still in place for lifting items up from the well below.

All the rooms on both sides of the main corridor have been adapted for new uses apart from the kitchen on the right hand side which still contains its cooker. At the far end of the corridor is the secondary stairway down to the lower level and another Z bend with two more blast doors. The second transformer is located at this point together with the original sewage plant which is still operational. The stairs up to the emergency exit are still in place with empty cable ways along both walls.

We descended the stairs to the lower floor where we were surprised to find the main plant room still intact and fully functional with am impressive array of 1950's plant including compressors, ventilation plant, freezing plant, fans, control panels and cabinets, filters etc. Everything was almost identical to the plant we had seen at Hope Cove a few weeks before but in better condition and all still working. This is probably not surprising as Hope Cove (R6) is just a surface version of an R3 bunker like Sopley.

At this point we had to end our all too short visit. We drove home via the dispersed camp on the north side of Derritt Lane which is intact and put to other uses.

Nick Catford

Visit to ROC 13 Group HQ at Carmarthen and post war AAOR for Swansea at West Cross

On 16th March a party of 5 Sub Brit members visited the ROC 13 Group headquarters at Picton Terrace, Carmarthen. The Group Control, which consists of a standard design surface blockhouse with a purpose built two storey brick administration block alongside is located at the rear of the TA Centre and is accessed along a drive alongside the centre. (SN405198) The protected centre opend in 1961 but the Carmarthen Group Control had been at this location since 1949 having moved there from the basement of the Lyric Cinema in the town.

Since stand down in 1992 the building has been leased to the Carmarthen Civil Protection unit who have maintained the bunker in superb original condition with most of its original fixtures and fittings from ROC days still intact. Their lease ran out at the end of March 2000 and the building has now been handed back to the Home Office for disposal. The following description was correct at the time of the visit.

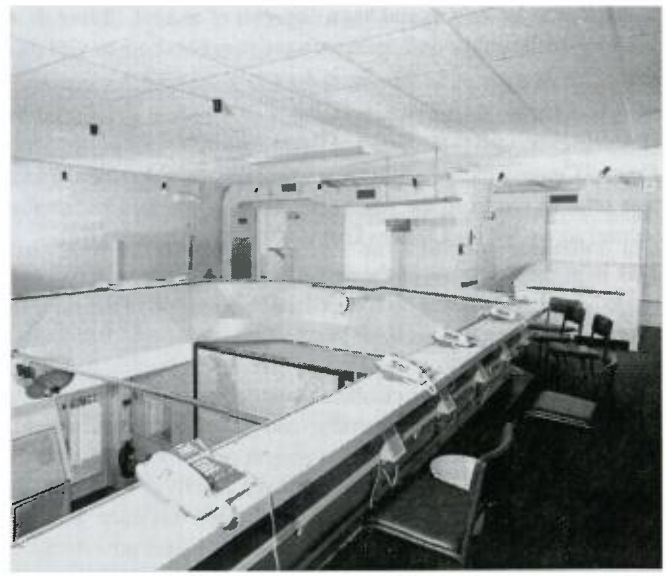
The building is entirely clad in corrugated metal sheeting painted dark green, identical cladding to the TA centre which was persuadably built at the same time. A small open porch gives access to two doors left and right. The right hand door opens into a single narrow room containing a filtration unit. Having entered the left hand door you immediately turn right into the main spine corridor. The first room on the left is the former decontamination room followed by the dressing room both of which are now used as a store. The next two rooms are the ladies and men's toilets which are both complete and still functioning. The next room on the left is the officers room followed by the male dormitory. All the beds have been removed from the male dormitory and both rooms are now used for storage. The final room on the left is the female dormitory which still retains all its original bunks and bedding.

The first room on the right hand side of the corridor is the plant room which still retains all its filtration and ventilation plant and compressors all in good order. At the back of this room, double doors lead into the standby generator room which is also still in place and in good condition together with its control unit. The next room on the right is the main two storey control room which, apart from the tote boards which have been removed is much as it was when the last observers moved out. The Perspex display screens showing the ROC clusters are still in place in their wooden mounts and the electricity supply to them is still connected and they lit up when the power was switched on. In front of them are the map tables still covered with maps (used by the Carmarthen protection unit) A door at the back of the control room leads into a room with tables and various items of radio equipment and this in turn leads into the BT room with a Faraday cage containing the BT exchange equipment still in place. The BT room leads back out to the main spine corridor. The next door along the corridor leads into the canteen and the final door is the kitchen with all its original fittings and a serving hatch into the canteen. Beyond the canteen the corridor turns to the right through two doors to the emergency exit at the back of the building.

Between the BT room and the control room, stairs lead up to the upper level consisting of a balcony around the control room. The underlet map table is still in place and working and all the telephones and seats around the balcony are still in place. At the back of the balcony is a display relating to the state of the air conditioning unit. The other two rooms at this level are the tank room, which still contained its tanks and the communications room which has been stripped of all equipment.

The usual instrument mountings were found on the roof with FSM and BPI pipes at the rear of the building and at a higher level, a GZI mounting on top of the radiator room which is accessed from the roof.

We were told that we could take anything that wasn't fixed down and arranged for a removal truck to visit the centre on 30th of March when all the display screens and numerous other items were removed and have



ROC Group HQ Carmarthen - Control Room

been taken to the 28 Group Headquarters in Dundee which is owned by Sub Brit member Ward Westwater, here they will be reinstalled at a later date.

From Carmarthen we drove to Swansea to visit the Anti Aircraft Operations Room at West Cross. The AAOR is also adjacent to the TA Centre at SN615897. It is currently managed by the Joint Emergency Planning Unit which serves Bridgend, Neath & Port Talbot and the City and County of Swansea. Externally the building is still in its 1950's condition although the original roof has been covered with an additional bitumen membrane and two original radar towers which were condemned have been demolished and replaced by a single mast with space rented to cellular phone operators.

For many years the building was used as the 'War Room' for the former West Glamorgan County Council and after Welsh local government reorganisation in 1986 it was passed over to the City and County of Swansea where it was used until recently as the 'Major Incident Command and Control Centre'. It is now used as a training facility and is let out to appropriate bodies. With the recent opening of a new major incident control room in the City the future of the building is uncertain but as its re-sale value is questionable and the rental from the radio mast exceeds the expenditure on the building its future is hopefully secure.

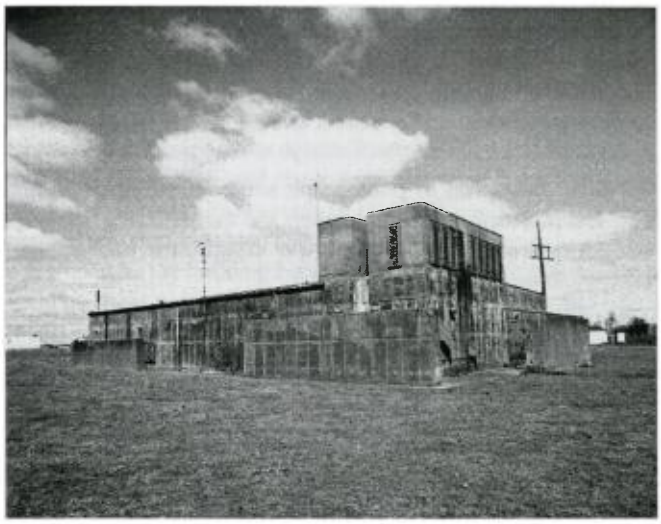
In common with many AAOR's on the west side of the country, the two storey blockhouse is completely above ground level with the entrance and emergency exit at the lower level. The original ventilation plant remains in place but the generator had to be replaced after it was started up without any oil and the boiler has been replaced. The structure of the lower floor remains much as it was with RAYNET occupying one of the rooms an original upright GPO switchboard still in place (although unused) and a Faraday cage containing the BT exchange equipment. The main two storey control room is intact with its balcony above. The curved Perspex windows at balcony level are still in place on two sides although on the third side the balcony has been boxed in. One of the stairways to the upper level has been blocked of at the request of the fire brigade.

On the upper level the multitude of small rooms and winding corridors was condemned as a fire hazard by the fire brigade and all the fibre board partition walls have been removed giving three large rooms that have been laid out as conference rooms with a canteen at the back.

Present: Sub Brit members Nick Catford, Tony Page, Nick McCamley. Ward Westwater, Caroline Westwater.

Visit to RAF Bentwaters

On the 7th April 2000 3 Sub Brit members, Dan McKenzie, Nick Catford and Andrew Smith visited the former RAF Bentwaters site in Suffolk. This site is now part used as an industrial park and the rest lies unused but fully secure. The future of the site is unknown as the owners wanted to open it as a commercial airport for East Anglia but local council objections have put paid to that idea. The runway is still used by occasional light aircraft but that is all.



RAF Bentwaters - One of 3 command bunkers

Having arrived we were given the keys (!) to enter the secure area. This comprises the main runway (1.5 miles long), hard standing, control tower, bomb stores, protected hangers and other buildings. We made our way to the first bomb storage area which was located on the other side of the billiard table smooth main runway.

This bomb store was set within its' own fenced area but fortunately the gate was open so we were able to drive in up to the individual stores. These were of the standard 'mounded earth' design and were quite large. Two large sliding doors were at one end to facilitate access into the store. Many of these stores were open and we entered one of them. All were identical in this area. There is an air vent with a fire shutter which was connected to a quick melt piece of wire that would shut the vent if fire broke out. Inside the light fittings were still in place although there was no power connected. There were yellow marks on the floor for vehicle positioning. Having photographed these stores we continued around to a large green building that had a loading platform on each side. Entry to the building is obtained via 3 pairs of large green sliding doors on each loading bay platform. We were unable to gain access to this heavily fortified building but looking through a gap in the doors it appeared to be divided into sections internally. We continues to walk in this area and came to plant areas that had blast shielding around them. One of the smaller buildings contained the remains of a generator and a 240v to 110v converter. Continuing on in this area we approached the rear fence which backed onto a second much more substantial and secure bomb storage area. It was interesting to note that all bomb stores had lightening conductor wires suspended approx. 20 feet above the roof of the building which were earthed by metal poles on each side.

At the back of this bomb store was a water tower (not climbed) and 2 buildings that had integral garages. These buildings had fortified sections within them although their purpose is unclear - possibly additional security for the bomb store area.

Having completed this area we moved on to the high security bomb store. We were joined by our guide at this point who had the keys to the gates!

Approaching the guardhouse along a straight piece of road it was easy to picture the base when it had been in use. Lying alongside the roadway were huge steel poles with 6" spikes sticking out of them. These were obviously used to provide additional protection against vehicles ramming the very heavy duty gates. They would have been deployed in front of the gates to deflate the tyres of any bandit vehicle approaching the bomb store.

Entry to this storage area was through a twin gate system cutting across all 4 fences including an electrified fence. These fences were in addition to the fences to enter the airfield proper once past security. The vehicles would drive into the area alongside the guardhouse and the outer gate would close behind them. This area was fully floodlit and had additional lighting at ground level for vehicle inspection. Once papers were checked and the visitors approved the inner gate would be opened to allow access to the compound. The guardhouse itself was in tact and had its' own generators (missing), BT coms room and a control area with a commanding view of the gates. Upstairs was a fortified area with gun holes overlooking the approach road and gate area.

Once inside there is a building to the left that was locked and it's purpose was unknown but it was not fortified in any way. Directly ahead was one of the observation towers for the site which we climbed using the staircase that spiralled its' way around the outside of the legs. This is a substantial tower and had a fully air conditioned (locked) room at the top which had commanding views over the high security area and some of the rest of the site. Much of the bullet proof glass had crazed but we could still see inside and the room was empty. The base of the tower had substantial concrete shielding against conventional attack and ramming by vehicles.

We returned to terra firma and walked along a long line of bomb stores. Most of these were locked but we found one that was open. These were similar to the stores in the other compound but had additional blast walls directly opposite the entry door and the doors themselves were much more substantial. At the end of this line of stores was a larger store and then the communications bunker. This is a surface blockhouse with gun points on all sides and was heavily fortified. We entered and it comprised a main office/work

RAF Bentwaters - Bomb store

area, integral garage for a vehicle, kitchen area, BT room, toilet (only the one) and the comms room itself. This was stripped of all equipment but had the desks etc still in place so we were able to get a very good idea of what it looked like when operational. Alongside this blockhouse was a comms tower that had a single aerial on it but did not appear to serve any current purpose for the nearby RAF Woodbridge.

We headed back to the gatehouse via the second row of bomb stores. These were of a different design and there were only 3 of them. They had integral garages and there were still cranes inside the buildings in the vehicle areas. This mat have been where the weapons were loaded onto lorries for transportation. Heading back to the gate the final building had a large steel shipping container built in to it in the vehicle area. This was an integral part of the building and why it was there we didn't know and neither did our guide. The same building also had an extremely secure cage in one of the rooms for housing something that they didn't want anyone to get hold of. What that was we don't know but was too small for an armoury but too big for anything nuclear. A small building just to the right of the gate house had what was left of a generator.

We then went to the control tower. This involved driving across the airfield past a number of hardened and conventional hangers and a wide variety of buildings. We managed a short drive along the runway which was in perfect condition and as smooth as a billiard table.

Our guide duly unlocked the control tower which was on 3 floors and still had the power connected. On the ground floor was a small entrance area with a reception room, a larger area led through to a corridor off which was the BT rack room which still had quite a lot of equipment and some RF transmission gear. Going upstairs took us to the in tact flight briefing area complete with NOTAM board and the insignia of 2 USAF Squadrons that must have been stationed there at some point.

The top floor comprised the aircraft control room and whilst all of the equipment was missing it was still in reasonable condition and had the points of the compass painted on the ceiling tiles. This gave an excellent view of the airfield operational areas.

With these additional security areas duly photographed our guide left us and we had the total freedom of the airfield and buildings for the rest of the day. We headed back to one of the fortified buildings we had passed and entered via a blast door. This was one of the Squadron buildings and was equipped with a full decontamination unit, plant room, blast doors etc and according to the signs could be fully sealed in the event of attack by NBC agents.

We then moved on to photograph some of the fortified and conventional hangers/aircraft shelters and the remaining buildings including a standby control tower which still had a lot of equipment present in it.

After this we headed over to the old command bunker which is now in commercial use so we were unable to gain internal access. However, we did find hidden in the trees nearby a very well concealed bunker which we were able to access but it was just a series of empty rooms.

Most of the site is used for sheep grazing and it is totally secure with 24hr security on the entrance gate (no entry except on business) and regular patrols plus the additional fencing to get through to reach the main airfield area.

Andrew Smith

Visit to Shirley war room & 8 Group ROC HQ

5 members of Subterranea Britannica spent a rewarding day in the West Midlands on the 21st December visiting the 9 Region war room in Stratford Road, Shirley on the southern outskirts of Birmingham followed by a visit to the 8 Group Royal Observer Corps HQ at Lawford Heath near Rugby.

Shirley is one of 13 regional war rooms built between 1951 and 1953. It is one of a network of bunkers built shortly after the war that were the predecessors of the RSG's. (See liost on page 262 of Warplan UK) By the mid 1950's they were considered inadequate and obsolete. Some were modernised and continued to serve a role in the cold war defences but that at Shirley was quickly redundant and was eventually sold to its present owners, Transco, in the 1970's.

It is a two storey windowless blockhouse measuring approximately 80' X 60' at ground level with an 60' X 60' upper floor. There are a number of ventilation towers on the lower roof.. Internally the room layout is almost identical to the now demolished war room at Tunbridge Wells visited by Sub Brit members in 1997 (See Siren No. 6). The building is generally in good internal and external condition and is used in part for archive storage by Transco.

The entrance is in the south east corner with a dogleg giving access to the first room, the ladies toilet and shower room. This room contains all its original fittings, showers, wash basins, hot water tank and toilet cubicles with curtains across each cubicle. The toilet role holders still contain rolls of hard paper (the sort you don't put your fingers through). Beyond the ladies toilets is a four way junction straight on into the ventilation plant room, right into a north - south corridor, left into an east -west corridor and a flight of stairs to the upper level. The plant room still retains all of its ventilation plant and a door at the far side leads into an 'L' shaped room that contains a large 1950's electrical cabinet for controlling the standby generator which is located in a small room in the leg of the 'L'. The large generator, dated 1953 appeares to be in excellent condition.

A doorway at the far side of the room with the electrical cabinet leads back into the north - south corridor where there is another dogleg to the emergency exit. Before dogleg are the male toilets and showers with fittings identical to the female room. Returning to the four way junction, passing the stairs, the east - west corridors turns 90 degrees to the north where there is a single small room which contains a hand cranked lift for sending documents to the upper floor. It consists of two wires running through a square hole in the ceiling. There is a handle at each end and pulley's that allows a small metal basket to be winched up and down between levels. Diagonally opposite this room an empty room gives access to the main control room well in the centre of the ground floor. This room was originally two storeys high with a gallery above looking down into it but a false floor has been installed by Transco with a service lift to the upper level and a ladder for emergency access. On the west side of the room there are curved Perspex windows, similar to those in AAOR's, looking out into the control room from three small rooms accessed from the north - south corridor. There is also a hatch in one corner of the east wall for passing

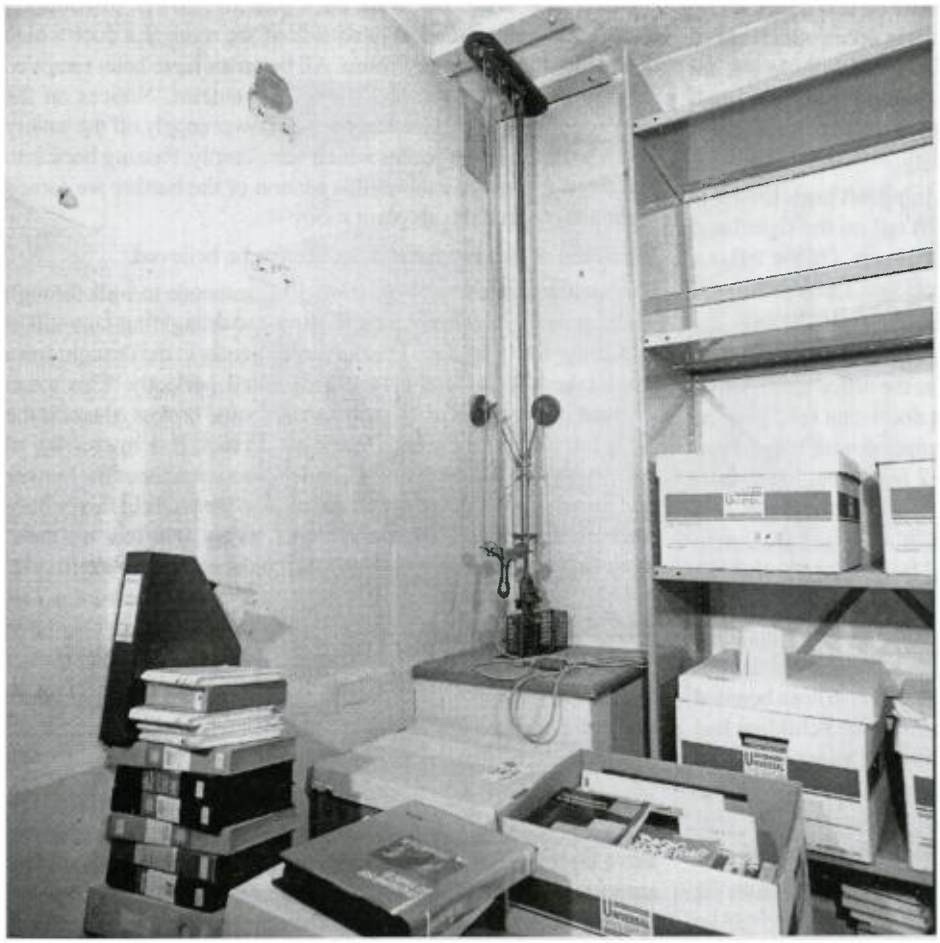
documents quickly into the next room. There are three rooms on the east side of the lower floor, each with a document hatch between them. There is a second staircase at the southern end of the north - south corridor.

The upper floor is slightly smaller than the lower floor and consists of the control room 'well' in the centre of the building (now floored over) with a room with Perspex windows looking down into the well. There is a corridor going round three sides of these two central rooms with a number of small rooms accessed from each side. On the east side of the building the corridor enters one long room which was the canteen/kitchen. A long counter, sink and hot water tank are all that remains. There is a flat area above each stairway with piping which presumably housed water tanks The building was photographed internally and externally.

8 Group ROC HQ is located on the edge of the former RAF Lawford Heath a few miles outside Rugby. After ROC stand-down in 1991, the bunker and the substantial administration block became Regional Government HQ 9.2 and was considered as a replacement for Drakelow. This was short lived however and within a few months the building became redundant and it was sold to a local business partnership for £50,000. During the next few years it was only used for illegal raves and parties and quickly fell into disrepair. In 1997 the site was sold to the present owners Satellite Media Services who provide an international internet service as well as providing the feed for IRN (Independent Radio News) and various local radio shared programmes. The administration block has been completely refurbished and altered and as well as offices houses the company's satellite equipment. It is their intention however to move much of this into the protected 'bunker' which is currently being completely refurbished. This work is expected to be completed by December 2000.

The bunker is of the semi-sunken variety with steps up to the original entrance blockhouse which contained the decontamination and filter rooms. Apart from the original porch which remains in place, the building has now been clad in brick. The three rooms at this level remain intact though completely stripped of original fittings. Stairs lead down to the main east - west spine corridor. At the bottom of the stairs a new entrance has been constructed in the east wall which links to a new 50 yard covered walkway to the admin. block. All the rooms on the south side of the corridor (dormitory's and toilets) have been gutted and are being refurbished. The corridor wall itself has been removed and a new curving wall built in Its place. The former officers' room at the western end has become the new toilet. The rooms along the northern side of the corridor are still largely intact but completely refurbished with lowered ceilings although it is still possible to identify the plant room, generator room, kitchen, canteen, BT room and balcony. The balcony is being retained as an area for visitors to look down into the new 'control room'. All the woodwork on the balcony has been stripped out and replaced with chromed railings. At the northern end of the east - west spine corridor the former emergency exit has been rebuilt with a wooden porch. The original stairs lead down to the bottom level where the control room is intact and will soon become the hub of the new complex. The communications room alongside is intact and refurbished. The pump up lattice radio mast lies on its side close by as do the original Perspex display screens which the company kindly donated to us.

Most of the construction work is now complete but many of the electrical fittings and wiring still have to be installed and although one room has been carpeted and contains a number of electrical cabinets that are in use, most of the rooms have yet to be decorated and furnished.



Shirley War Room - Metal basket for passing messages between floors

My thanks to Keith Ward for arranging the visit to Shirley and Tim Whittingham, Managing Director of Satellite Media Services for showing us round his superbly refurbished bunker. We have been invited back at a later date to see the completed work once the 'Earth Station' is on line. Satellite Media Service have their own web site at www.sms.co.uk/

Those present were: Nick Catford, Dan McKenzie, Richard Challis, Keith Ward, Andrew Smith.

Nick Catford

Visit to BT Repeater station at Warmley, Bristol

Sunday July 9th saw Nick Catford and myself brave unpredictable weather for trip to the former BT repeater station at Warmley near Bristol.

This is a PR2 type repeater station built around 1951 and is located in a residential area just off the A420. It's a 2 story building with one story buried deep underground and the other on the surface. The building is divided into 3 distinct parts:

1. Office section
2. Above ground protected area
3. Below ground protected area

We arrived at the site to find the doors open and a small generator chugging away just inside the door. This was powering portable site lighting as the mains power is now disconnected. We walked in and after a couple of minutes found the site owner and asked for permission to have a look round and take photographs. He readily agreed and then decided to give us a guided tour as well!! Having shown us around we were then given free run of the building to photograph what we wanted and the owner also said that we could 'take whatever we wanted' and Nick and I were able to recover a few items of interest.

Let's start the tour:

Entry off the road is through a pair of double wire mesh gates. On entering the site there is a large hole on the right hand side approx. 125ft across. At the bottom of this hole you can see the fuel tanks for the bunker. The site owner informed us that these were being removed in a few days by a mobile crane in preparation for the building work thatwill be taking place (more on that later). There is a small parking area to the left of the main doors which are of traditional heavy wooden construction. Once inside these you are standing in a small room. A doorway to the right leads to 2 small rooms which are completely empty apart from building materials and are not re-enforced in any way.

Going back into the entrance room and turning left leads to a huge pair of yellow steel blast doors approx 9ft tall on the right hand wall. The doors still swing easily on their hinges. On the left is a crane well for lowering object to the lower floor. Passing through the blast doors you enter the bunker proper.

You are now in a rectangular area. To the right are stairs down to the lower level and a blast door that leads to the office area. Across to your left is another set of yellow blast doors that lead into the upper floor. The bunker is very well equipped with blast doors and the owner tells us that the walls are 2 feet thick. The whole building has a very secure feel about it.

Let's turn right and pass through the blast door into the office area. We are now standing at the end of a short corridor. Passing along this corridor there are a couple of rooms (all empty) on each side and at the end we reach the ladies and gents toilets. This was the scene of a forced entry by local kids last night and there is much broken glass on the floor and the windows have been boarded up. The owner told us how on a previous break-in 3 children had become trapped in this section and in an attempt to get out ended up in hospital due to injuries sustained. One of the rooms off the corridor was a kitchen and had some work top type units left. This room had been damaged by fire on a previous break-in.

Walking back along the corridor we return to the bunker area via the blast door.

Warmley

We walk back past the entrance blast doors and go through anothe set of yellow blast doors and into the top floor of the bunker. W are now standing in a large room which contains a number o power distribution boxes the size of large filing cabinets. Th contactors still have a reassuring 'chunk' to them when moved Walking to our left we pass into another room which has a emergency escape door at the back of it. There is evidence o vandalism in this area with the partition wall showing holes where the local kids have practised being Bruce Lee.....

The emergency exit leads through 2 security doors to the rear o the bunker. The internal emergency exit door is blast proof an the short passage to the outside world is a dog leg to reduce th force of the blast. We walk back past the power distributio equipment and on the left hand side of the room is a door whic leads into the old battery room. All batteries have been remove but the marvellous red tiled floor still remains. Notices on th doors confirm that this was the back up power supply.off the batter room were 2 smaller rooms which were empty. Passing back int the room where we entered this section of the bunker we turne right and entered the air plant room.

The scale of this room has to be seen to be believed.

The air intake ducts are large enough for someone to walk throug and contained all the damping shutters and draughting fans still i tact along with filtering. The fan turned gently in the draught fro the intake and the dampers still operated perfectly. This roo showed minor signs of vandalism with some broken glass on th floor but everything was in place and in tact. It is interesting t note that all rooms on this level, and indeed throughout the bunke had massive amounts of power fed around the walls in heavy dut steel conduit. Fuse boxes were sited every few feet on thes conduits (fuses still in place) and there was extensive labelling a to the supply available and voltage etc. Two of the rooms ha markings on the floor which led us to believe that there may hav been racks of telecomms equipment sited in them at one point.

We return to the entrance room and descend the 3 flights of stair to the lower level.

The best was yet to come....

At the bottom of the stairs we are at the end of a short corridor. O the left hand side of the corridor are 4 doorways. The first 2 lea into a high voltage power room where the HV substation could b monitored. The CO_2 fire extinguisher system was still in plac and appeared in working order although we didn't try it out!!!

The next 2 doorways (which were double with heavy steel doors) led into a small are athat contained 2 independent HV transformer that were the size of a small car and about 6 ft tall. They were very similar to the type normally found at small local electricity substations. It was becoming obvious that there was a lot of power available at this site.

Just how much we were about to find out.

At the end of this corridor on the left was a space where loads could be lowered from the upper floor via a now missing winch system which could run along a beam in the upper level entrance room.

On the right was another set of huge blast doors - we entered into the final area of the bunker.

We emerged into the plant room. This contained 2 huge generators, power boards, control plant, air compressors, distribution panels etc all in perfect condition and full working order so the owner told us. The site had been shut in 1995 but there had been regular maintenance until it's recent sale and the generators could be started if needed.

The generators were a 215KVA autostart and a 250KVA air start. The power distribution around the building together with the battery back up meant that in the event of mains power failure the batteries would take over whilst the generator ran up to speed to power the telecoms gear. A second generator provided back up and could be used to run the housekeeping functions such as air con and lighting etc. The fuel tanks outside held enough fuel to run in 'closed down' mode for around a month. At the end of this room was a door leading to an emergency escape shaft with a steel rung ladder leading to the surface. Close to this was a blast door into the air intake which ran to the very top of the building and contained all the air cooling gear etc. This was separated from the bunker by a blast door and all intakes to the generators were fitted with dampers and filters. Going back past the entrance door we entered the largest room in the bunker. It's the size of 3 tennis courts and obviously was the main equipment room. Marks on the wooden block floor showed were a substantial number of racks had been sited and there was a colossal number of ceiling lights and vents together with endless power ducting and fuse boxes. There was some water on the floor here - how it entered the bunker is unknown but is was being mopped up whilst we were there. At the end of this room to the right was another escape shaft to the emergency exit for the floor above and then at the very end was a final room.

This is the room where the cables entered from outside. It was flooded to a depth of 4 inches but still had a substantial amount of rack and cable glands in tact and had 2 sealable doors (one at either end) connecting it into the main equipment room.

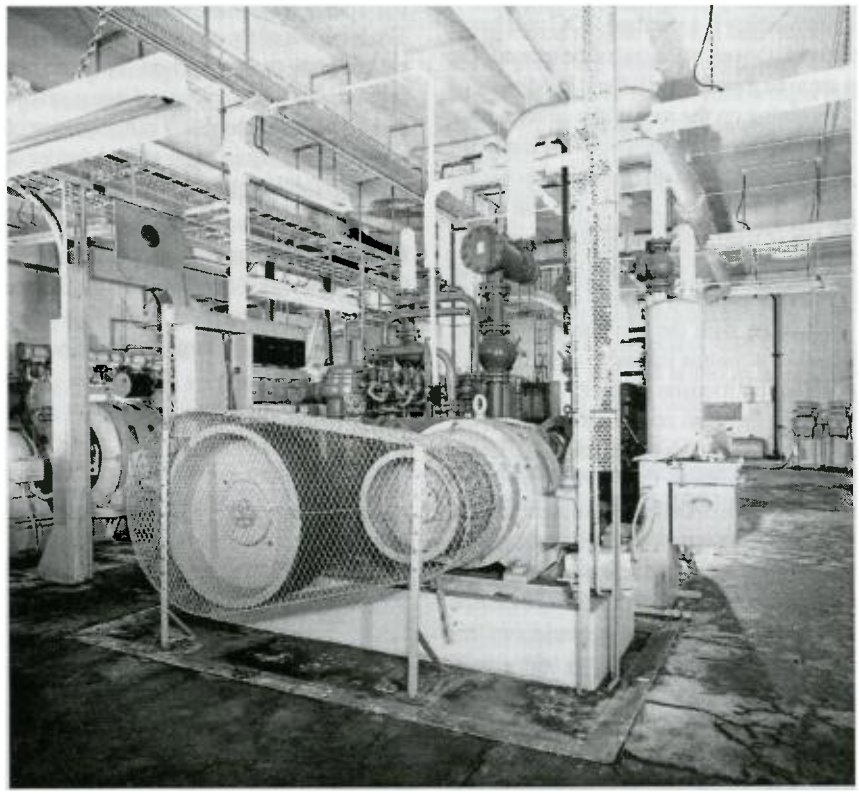
The entire building has been extensively photographed and a number of items have been recovered. Externally the building is in average condition with the windows to the office section boarded up. It is interesting to note that the protected areas did not have any toilets or showers.

We had a long chat with the owner who informed us that the site will soon be developed for flats. He intends to retain the basement structure which will be converted into underground car parking whilst everything above ground will be flattened. All the plant will be removed and sold for scrap or donated to a museum.

The owner was exceedingly friendly and could not have been more helpful if he had tried. He told us that he possessed the original 1951 Ministry of Works plans for the construction of the building.

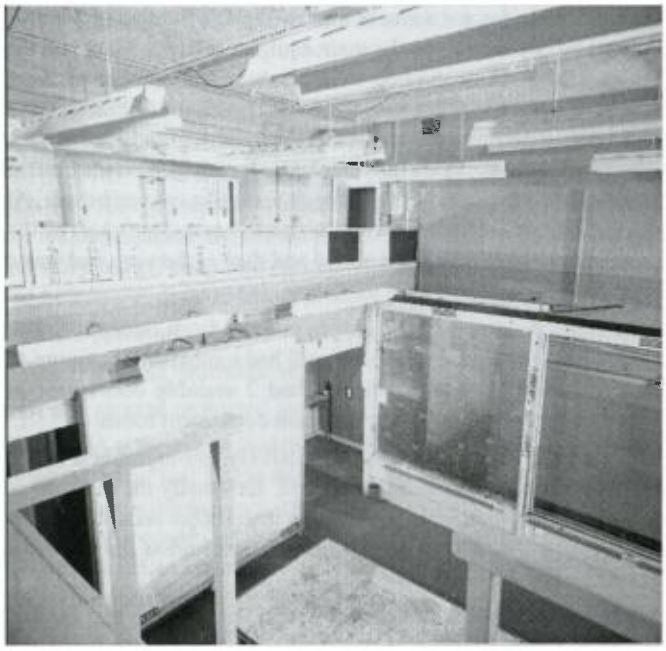
The owner has agreed to a visit by Sub Brit and 30+ members were able to visit a few weeks later.

Andrew Smith



Warmley - Plant Room

Visit to York & Leeds ROC Group HQ's



ROC Group HQ York - Control Room

On the 5th May 7 members of Subterranea Britannica and two non members (about time you joined Wayne) visited the ROC Group Headquarters at York and Leeds. Sub Brit members were Nick Catford, Dan McKenzie, Andrew Smith, Roger Thomas, Nigel Knapton, Andy White +1 with Wayne Davies +1 as the non members.

The York group HQ is located at the rear of Shelley House on the north side of Acomb Road on the B1224 running west out of Leeds. (SE580515). It is of the semi sunken variety and is access up a flight of steps up a steep mound at the rear of the car park. There is a single storey brick built administration block alongside. On top of the mound at the eastern end is the original emergency exit hatch which is a standard ROC post hatch. Later a door was added a few feet to the east at the end of the mound. The usual instrument mountings are to be found with BPI and FSM pipes on the mound itself and a GZI mounting on the roof of the small surface building. The ladder up to the roof has been removed. Internally the bunker is on three levels. On the right through the entrance door is the filter room with all the filters still in situ and on the left is the decontamination room beyond these rooms, steps lead down and round a corner to the main east -west spine corridor which, due to the height of the mound is actually on the surface and then covered over. The first room on the right is the plant room with the ventilation plant and compressors still in place with a door at the rear leading to a smaller room containing the diesel generator. The next room on the right is the canteen/ kitchen. A short corridor leads from the main corridor with a doorway into the kitchen on the right. The corridor then opens into the canteen with a connecting serving hatch between them. On the rear wall of the canteen is a cupboard containing various electrical boxes. All of the kitchen equipment is still in place. Next is the BT room which still contains a lot of wiring and two wall mounted cabinets on the rear wall containing switching equipment. After a stairway down to the third level there is a door opening onto the balcony around the well of the control room. All the revolving tote boards remain in place around the balcony with a small open ended room at the far end with a cluster map on the wall and a large floor mounted light box. Going round the gallery there is a second door out into the spine corridor. Turning right leads round a corner and through two doors is the emergency exit. Between the two doors there is a ladder up to the original emergency exit hatch. Returning to the bottom of the steps down from the surface there is a small room on the left opposite the plant room containing all the sewage pumping equipment. Rooms on the left hand side of the spine corridor are the male and female toilets which are all intact although not working, the male and female dormitories (female bigger) which have been stripped of all fittings and the officers room.

Going down into the well of the control room the wooden mountings for the Perspex map screens are still in place. The B display is still in its mounting but the A display has been removed and is on display at the Imperial War Museum in London. The folding command table is still in place with maps on it and on one wall there is a large map of the UK (Display T) with the country divided into the various groups and sectors. There is also a display board on one wall labelled 'Communications Tote' and a ladder up to the balcony. There is a long window through into the communications centre which contains a number of tables, a rack of files and notices on the walls. The radio room is also on this level This still contains wiring, telephones and a large floor standing cabinet.

At present the power is still on although restricted to the spine corridor and control room as the centre is suffering very badly from damp with water on the floor in places. The future of the bunker is uncertain, it is owned by the local council whose planning department use Shelly House. They plan to sell the site for redevelopment in the near future although English Heritage who manage the site have campaigning for its preservation and it has recently been announced that the bunker has been scheduled as an ancient monument which secures its future both externally and internally.

From York we moved on to Leeds Group HQ which is located on an industrial estate on the west side of the A658 Victoria Avenue just to the west of Leeds Bradford Airport. The centre is located in a very secure compound which is used for storing cars. When the Corps was re-organised in 1968 the Group HQ closed with most posts being transferred to 20 Group, York. After closure the bunker was taken over by the Royal Naval Reserve who used it as a training centre. They vacated around 1995 and the bunker was incorporated into the adjacent industrial estate and is currently available for rent.

The bunker is of the sub surface variety with steps up to the entrance on top of a grass covered mound. The surface building has been re-painted in its original white colour and is in good condition. On the south side of the mound is an emergency exit consisting of a standard ROC type hatch with a siren platform next to it. A ladder up to the roof of the surface building is still in place. On the roof their is a GZI mounting and another siren platform.

The entrance door opens onto the small top floor of the three level bunker. On the right is the filter room with the filters still in place and on the left is the decontamination room. Beyond these rooms steps lead down, round a corner to the main north - south spine corridor. The first room on the

ROC Group HQ Leeds

right is the plant room. Some of the original ventilation plant is still in place but some of it has been replaced with new equipment. A door at the rear of the plant room leads into the small stand-by generator room. The diesel generator is still in position. The next room on the right is the canteen/kitchen. There is a short corridor running from the main spine corridor with a door into the kitchen on the right, it then opens out into the canteen. There is a serving hatch between them. There is a cabinet on the rear wall of the canteen containing electrical boxes. The kitchen equipment is all intact although the cooker is not original. The next room is the BT room which has been stripped followed by stairs down to the bottom level and then a door opening onto the balcony around the control room. The control room is completely empty. It has been fitted with flashing coloured lights and ultra violet tubes (all still working) so presumably the RNR have been in use as a disco. At the far end of the balcony the corner has been walled off with doors in and out making a small room that would have contained the large floor standing light box. At the far end of the balcony is a second door back out into the spine corridor. Turning right through a door there is a ladder up to the emergency entrance hatch. As this is an early closure there is no emergency exit door. Returning to the bottom of the stairs from the top level there is a sewage pump room opposite the plant room with all the equipment in pristine condition. Running down the spine corridor on the left are the male and female toilets still intact and in good working order, the male and female dormitories (female bigger) which have been stripped of all original fittings. The final room on the left was the officers room but this has been converted into a gun store with a new strengthened door.

On the lower level the partition wall between the control room and the communications centre has been removed (more room for dancing !) and a new steel ladder with a cage round it up to the balcony has been installed. The radio room contains a large floor standing metal cabinet, a lot of wiring and a long table divided into individual booths.

Internally and externally the bunker is in fine condition although it is starting to suffer a little from damp. A new tenant and a dehumidifier should sort the problem out quickly.

This ended our visit to the York and Leeds Group HQ's. Myself and Andrew Smith stayed in Yorkshire for the following weekend (see separate posting) to visit some ROC Posts while everyone else departed for various parts of the country.

Nick Catford 14.5.2000

Visit to Oxfordshire County Council emergency centre

16th May 2000 saw a small group of SB members visit the former Oxfordshire County Council bunker on the North East side of Oxford.

This is a single floor bunker built in 1960 and located in a small village outside of Oxford. The structure is completely below ground and access is gained by descending a flight of steps at the side of the main building on the site. The stairs turn 90 degrees part way down and you are then facing the door which leads into the bunker.

Just to the right of the entrance door is another door which led into the filter room which was kitted out but the filters were never fitted into their mounts. Entering through the outer door of the bunker you turn left and go through a second door which leads into the main corridor. Neither of these 2 door were gas or blast proof but one was made of steel and is used as a security door. Our guide told us that in the event of war the entrance way would have been sealed with rubble and earth etc to make it blast resistant. Ingress and egress could then be via the emergency exit which was blast protected.

Back to the corridor: turning left from just inside the entrance door led a short distance to a door which connected into the basement of the main building. It is in this section of the building that the generator is located and several rooms on the ground floor had telephone points etc for the ECN system and in the event of times of tension this area could be used but was unprotected.

Going back into the bunker proper, just opposite the entrance is a door leading to the main communications room. This still housed the Faraday cage for the BT equipment and had a number of aerial points etc still in situ. It also housed the lines from the ECN system but our guide thought that the system would soon be scrapped. There were a number of civil defence relics in this room including the remains of the paper messaging system and the hatches in the walls for passing them from room to room.

Off the Comms room was a room that would have been used as a general work area and it contained 3 locked steel cabinets packed full of radiation monitoring kit still in its' boxes etc. A door from this room led back into the corridor. On the room were a series of local area maps but these were not cold war related. A second door led into what was the scientific advisors room. On the walls were all the fallout monitoring charts and various maps including one of the ROC post locations in Oxfordshire and the charts and tote boards for reporting fallout warnings. Every chart and map was protected by cellophane and was in perfect condition. 2 Bookshelves groaned under the weight of a number of books and papers including a copy of London Under Attack and War Plan UK!

A third shelf contained the County Emergency Plans which were last updated around 1994. These totalled a number of volumes in heavy duty ring binders and there was a most interesting section on the disposal of bodies following a nuclear attack.

Going back into the work room and turning immediately right through a further door took us into a second room and this contained the emergency exits. This was the main Ops room. The original emergency exit was a small hatch in the wall which led into a vertical shaft which would have been filled with sand and led to the surface. If it was needed the occupants would have had to dig their way out through the sand to reach the surface! A second exit, fully blast protected with double doors etc was installed in the early 80's and this led to an almost identical set of steps to the main entrance which went up to the surface.

There is also a small store room off the Ops room and this contained the military aerial connection points and a number of items for those participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme.

The bunker is currently in use as a meeting and conference facility and 2 of the rooms were laid out for a Duke of Edinburgh award exercise for this evening.

Those who were present were: Tony Page, Nick Catford, Pete Turier, Jon Maisey, James Allen and Andrew Smith. This was an excellent visit to a forty year old bunker which still had many original features. The bunker has been fully photographed and documented. The site is very secure as it is part of a large complex and unauthorised visitors are not welcome.

Andrew Smith

Visit to Goosnargh & Lancs CC Emergency Centre

Visit to Goosnargh WW2 SOC and ROC Group HQ & Lancs CC Emergency Centre

On Wednesday 7th June 3 bunkers near Preston, Lancs. were visited by Nick Catford, Dan McKenzie and Andrew Smith.

The first bunker we saw was the Filter Room of the WW2 RAF Sector Operations Centre at Goosnargh near Preston. (SD54953625) in Whittingham Lane. During the war, this was part of a network of three bunkers (Main OP's bunker, filter room and communications bunker) and was a collecting point for information. Duplicate and irrelevant information could be filtered out here.

The two level bunker has been empty for 8 years, its last use being as a military firing range. It has now been offered for sale by tender by the Ministry of Defence and this was the second viewing day with 70 potential buyers and members of the press present. Having been told by the agent that only potential buyers would be able to look round we posed as a company looking for a suitable site for a recording studio.

We were first to arrive to be met by a local drainage company who had the previous day been pumping water out of the lowest level. On this occasion they only needed to pup out a few inches of water but for the first open day in January they had to pump out two feet of water. As there is no longer any mains power they installed flood lighting in all the corridors and the well and balcony of the operations room.

On arrival we were informed that the bunker was designated by the MOD as a Category C confined space and that photography was strictly prohibited. Having previously been told by the agent that photography would be allowed I protested to one of the contractors, who said he was not a 'jobsworth' and that in his opinion the air was as good inside as outside. He agreed to make a phone call to the relevant agency and was informed that we could take photographs so long as the flash gun was allowed to charge outside -luckily he didn't enforce this.

By the time the agent arrived at 10 o'clock there was quite a crowd assembled but we were only allowed in 6 at a time so we joined the first party.

The bunker is located on the south side of the road in 0.74 acres of land and is securely fenced. All that is visible from the road is a grass covered roughly rectangular mound approximately 15 feet high with two air vents on the top. There are two entrances into the mound fronting onto the road. Between the bunker and the road there is an underground oil storage tank and an electricity sub station.

We entered by the main entrance into a short corridor leading to the main east - west corridor. A few yards inside the main entrance steps lead up to the generator room. The generator is intact and appears to be in good condition although vandals got into the site some time ago and have damaged the control panel, pulling much of the wiring out. As we entered the main corridor turning right led immediately to a flight of stairs down to the lower level. We turned left and the first door on the right led onto the balcony which goes right round the central well of the operations room with narrow wooden steps down one side. The next three rooms on the right were all empty and we were told they had been dormitories. After the third room we reached a 'T' junction, left led out to the emergency exit. We turned right and on our left there was a small store room, a larger empty room, male toilets, another stairway down to the lower level and another male toilet. We then turned right again past three more dormitories that were all empty and through a door onto the balcony.

Going down the stairs inside the main entrance to the lower level we came to another short flight of stairs down below the level of the operations room. It was damp down here and the tide mark on the wall showed that the water had been at least two feet high. There were some electrical boxes on the wall and a door into a large ventilation plant room. All the ventilation plant was intact but as part of the control cabinet has been under water for some time it is probably now useless. We retraced our steps up the short flight of stairs and along the lower corridor where the main door on the right led into the main operations room which has always remained just above the water level and its wooden floor is still in good condition. We lifted a trap door in the floor and could see the water a short distance below.

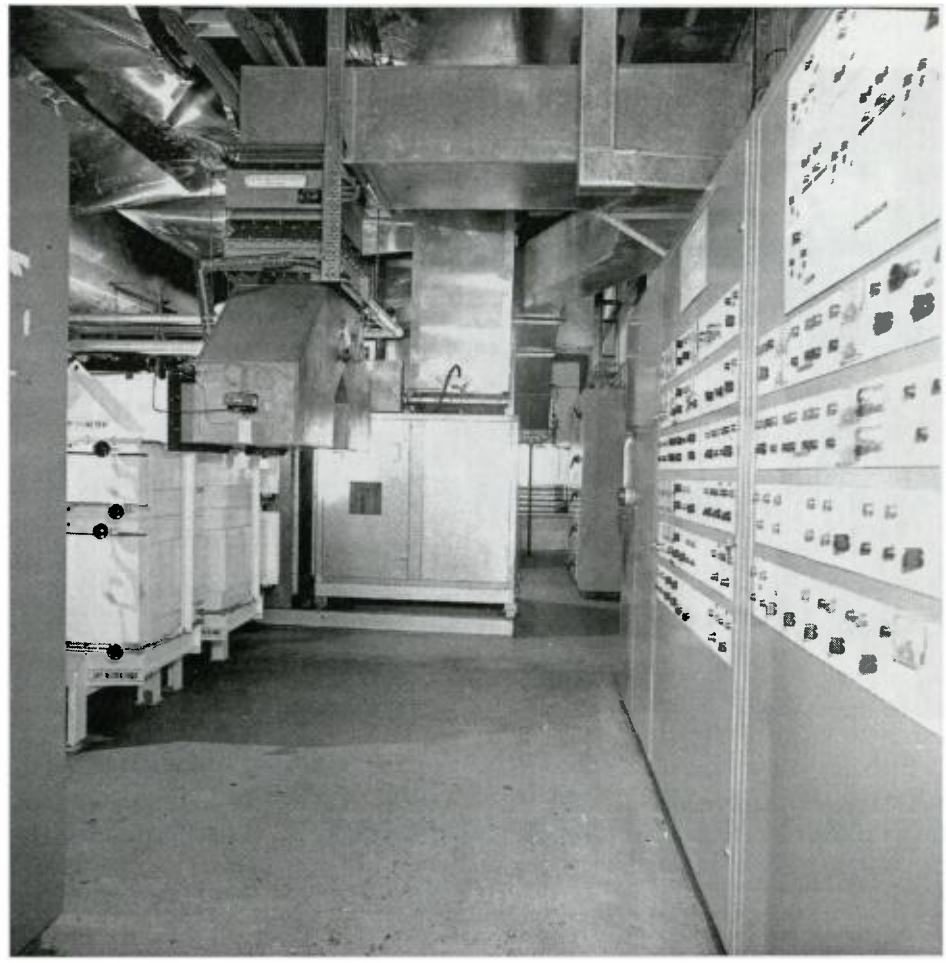
The only evidence of past use are to be found here in the form of two 8 foot high vertical movement wall boards manufactured in West Germany by Weyel. One board was a front illuminated map of the north west coast area running inland from North Wales in the south to just south of the Scottish Border in the north. The board next to it had details of troop movements on it. Returning to the main lower corridor the next room on the right was the canteen, completely stripped out with a serving hatch into the kitchen. The kitchen consists of two large rooms and a smaller room which had been a larder. Most of the kitchen equipment, cooker, sinks, work tables etc. were still intact.Turning right at the end of the main corridor there was a female rest room and toilet on the left followed by stairs up to the upper level then another male toilet. The corridor then turned to the right, past two more dormitories on the right and through a door into the operations room.

ROC Group HQ Preston (Goosnargh)

We emerged from the bunker to a slow hand clap from the waiting crowd who were growing impatient by the time we were taking - photography is a slow process. Before leaving we posed for a photograph for the local paper and were interviewed by the local radio station about our plans for turning the bunker into a recording studio. We then left the site for the half mile drive to the main ops room bunker which had, until 1992, housed 21 Group ROC Headquarters and Western Area Sector Control.

On the way we passed the power house for the complex, a large brick blockhouse on the north side of Whittingham Lane (SD54753628)

The Former ROC Group HQ is now owned by a veterinary practice who use the administration block alongside although the bunker itself is empty. In the past, been used for training by the emergency services. 21 Group was only formed in 1962 incorporating posts from the redundant Lancaster and Manchester Groups. The former SOC operations bunker was refurbished at great cost and to a high specification. The end was removed from the earth mound and an extension built to house a state of the art ventilation/heating and filtration plant room and a separate standby generator room with two generators.

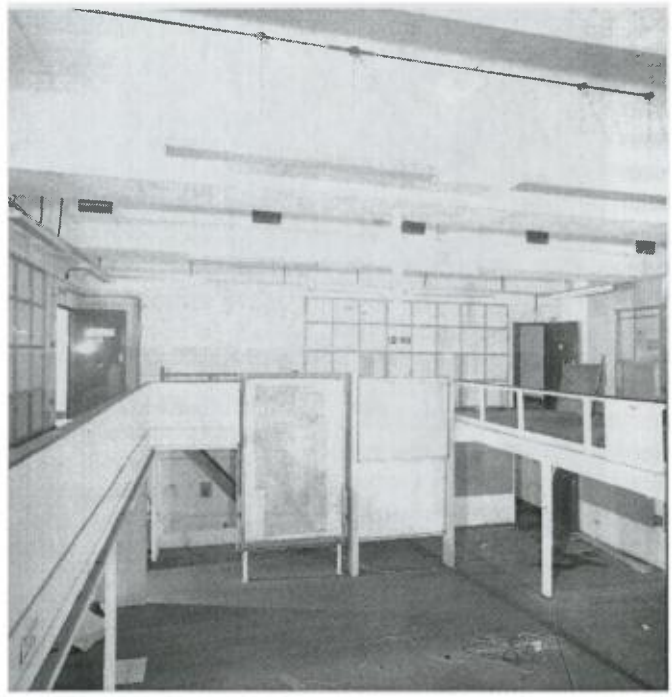


ROC Group HQ Preston (Goosnargh) - State of the art plant room

The site is on the east side of Langley Lane at SD53953645. Going through the main gate, the prefabricated administration block, now used as the veterinary practice is on the left hand side with the rectangular grass covered mound of the bunker running east - west on the right hand sand. There is a small guardhouse just inside the main gate and a 100 foot high permanent aerial mast, now used by Vodaphone on the south side of the bunker. There is a set of steps onto the top of the mound which at its eastern end has three large ventilation towers above the generator room. Behind these towers are three small ventilation towers above the ventilation plant room. One of these has steps up with a GZI mounting plate on the top. Further back on the mound the BPI and FSM pipes are still visible.

The main entrance is on the north side at the eastern end. Passing through two gas-tight blast doors leads to the east - west corridor running the length of the north side of the bunker, there is a similar corridor running the length of the south side. Having passed through the two blast doors, a door leads into two decontamination rooms with sinks and water tanks, the second of which leads out into a north - south corridor linking the two east - west corridors, this corridor also contains male and female toilets which are intact but not working. There are a number of rooms between the two corridors that probably housed dormitories and one long room with a blackboard that was probably a briefing room. At the end of both long corridors a short set of steps lead down to a sub level balcony which runs three sides around the main control room with steps down into the well of the control room at each end of the balcony. As with most rooms, this area has been completely stripped but a mounting for an FSM is still in place in the middle of the balcony. Beyond the steps down to the balcony is an unusual long room linking both east west corridors. This room is at the lower balcony level with steps down into it from each corridor. This was probably part of the original war time balcony around a much larger ops. room. At the far eastern end of the upper level is the kitchen which has been completely stripped apart from the 'dumb waiter' lift (still working) to take food down to the canteen on the floor below.

Next to the kitchen which is accessed from another north - south corridor linking the main east - west corridor there is a set of stairs leading down to another sub level which contains the emergency exit on the south side of the bunker and a door into the impressive ventilation/heating and filtration plant room. Contrary to reports that the plant has been stripped out and sold for scrap everything is intact and gleaming with all the plant and associated control cabinets in excellent condition. There are three windows into the generator room to the east. Returning to the emergency exit a second flight of stairs lead down to the lower level which also has two east - west corridors running the length of the bunker. At the eastern end on this level there is a network of small rooms and interconnecting passages all of which have been completely stripped. The only recognisable room is the canteen with the bottom end of the 'dumb waiter' lift. Both corridors lead into the well of the operations room which has obviously been taken out of use at some time as another room has been built inside it. At the back of the operations room a doorway leads into the communication centre with its walls covered in peg board. At the back of this room two steps lead up through a low doorway (anyone over about 5' 10" needs to stoop) into another communications room and through another door into a very large rectangular room with two supporting pillars in the middle and a dais along one side. This



WW2 Filter Room - Goosnargh

would appear to be the later control room. The BT room is accessed from the southern corridor and has some racking still in place together with some modern Vodaphone equipment and one telephone..

At the eastern end is another set of male and female toilets. The bunker is clean and dry throughout and the power is on in all rooms. Apart from one room that contains a few items of old furniture there is no evidence that it is used for storage and no evidence that it is being used by the emergency services for training.

The generator room is accessed through a door on the outside alongside the emergency exit. Steps lead down into the large square room which has been completely stripped of everything apart from the concrete bases for the generators. Three doors in the west wall lead into three smaller rooms which are used to store straw. These rooms have doors into the western face of the mound. Although the bunker is securely locked, the generator room is left open.

We did not have time to visit the smaller communications bunker which is located alongside a public footpath at SD52713619.

Our final port of call for the day is the Lancashire County Council Emergency Centre in Lea Road, Preston (SD49523154). The bunker, which was built in 1956, is located partially in the basement but mostly under the rear garden of Westleigh House a former mill owners house on the western outskirts of Preston. The county's emergency planning is still controlled from Westleigh House and the Emergency Centre below is still fully equipped and maintained and ready for use in the event of a major incident. Our guides for this visit were Emergency Planning Office Mike Wagstaff and a former scientific advisor from UKWMO at Goosnargh. Although the bunker appears to be below ground it is actually at ground level. When the house was built in the last century the water table was found to be only a few inches below the surface so the basement of the house was built above ground and the ground built up in front of it so the ground floor above it appeared to be at ground level. At the rear of the house the garden is at the original ground level and this is where the bunker was built. It was covered over with soil and grassed and now appears as a very high mound in the rear garden.

The blast doors linking the house from the bunker have been taken out and replaced by ordinary doors. The basement part of the bunker contains the ventilation plant room with the plant dating back to the 1950's. Although the plant is still operational it is not used and the room is used for general storage. The standby generator is in an adjacent room. This was replaced in the late 1980's and is still fully operational. From this point we pass out of the basement into the bunker entering a reception area with doors into a fully equipped kitchen and canteen and another door leading into the twin communications rooms which contain computer terminals and a number of transceivers, including two operated by Raynet. The government ECN telephone exchange in its Faraday Cage is also found in the second of the communications rooms. All the walls are covered information sheets. Returning to the main reception area, another door leads into the main operations room at the centre of the bunker with another door leading from there into the emergency services communications room with transceivers linked to each of the emergency services (fire police and ambulance) but at the military desk there is just an aerial plug and cable, they bring their transceiver with them each time they attend an exercise. A door at the far end of the operations room leads in to a large 'L' shaped agency room with a computer terminal point, telephone and desk for each agency that needs to be represented including local wildlife groups. At the far end of the agency room one of the few remaining blast doors leads back into the basement into what is described as the liaison room laid out as a briefing roof with rows of seats, TV, video and projectors. Alongside the liaison room there are two store rooms one of which contains an emergency exit hatch consisting of a ladder up to an ROC type hatch in the garden. There is a second emergency exit consisting of twin blast doors alongside the generator room. The bunker has never had any dormitories and the only toilets were chemical one and these have now been removed.

So ended out tour of the Lancs. CC Emergency Centre one of the best maintained and equipped centres I have seen. Our thanks to Mike Wagstaff and his staff for an enjoyable and informative couple of hours.

Visit to RGHQ 7.2 Hope Cove

Wednesday 12th April 2000 saw 6 SB members visit the former ROTOR R6/RGHQ 7.2 bunker at Hope Cove in Devon. Nick McCamley, Richard Challis, Dan McKenzie, Tony Page and myself joined Nick Catford who organised and led this trip for a very early drive along the M4 and M5.

The bunker is built in an outstanding position on high ground near the Devon coast on the site of the former RAF Hope Cove. Virtually nothing of the RAF station remains apart from one building that is now used by the farmer for storage. The bunker is positioned away from the road behind the farm area and is within a double ring fence. The total site is 4.78 acres.

The bunker is reached by a long drive from the narrow single track road which passes a number of farm buildings. The gate in the first fence is open and following the drive way we arrived at the second gate which was locked. Some of the fencing on the inner fence was in need of repair and there were 2 patched holes. Once the key holder arrives we were able to drive up to the bunker. The structure is a surface blockhouse with 900mm thick walls. Outside there are 2 fuel tanks on the far side of the bunker and a very large water type tank near the entrance door. The bunker is entered at ground floor level through a doorway which an attempt has been made to make secure with chicken wire and wood. There are the remains of a scissor action shutter door in this area that obviously used to be fixed over the door way. Turning immediately right you climb approx. 12 steps to a double width blast door. There is a small motorised crane attached to the ceiling in this area. Passing through the door you enter into a small reception area and turn left into the main corridor of the upper floor! This is one of a number of curious features of this bunker. Immediately on your right is a set of steps down to the lower floor with another crane attached to the ceiling to lift items up the wide staircase between the floors.

We'll start on the upper floor.

All the rooms on this floor were located off this corridor which ran the length of the bunker. The first door on the left led into a room which had steps down to a sunken floor and had steps up again at the far side into another room. This room was totally empty as was every other room on this floor. Carrying along this corridor there were numerous rooms along with the male and female toilets and showers which were all in working order but we had been warned that the water quality was poor.

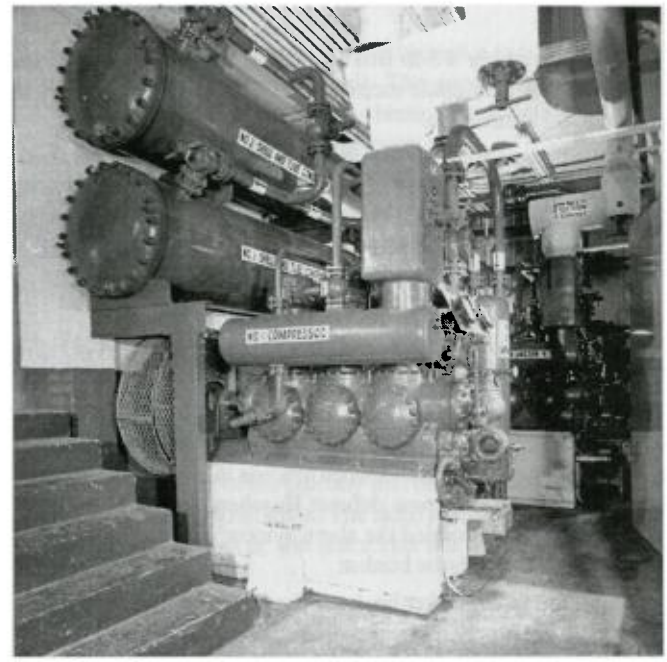
A sign on the wall stated 'ROTOR R6 HOP'.

At the end of this corridor were steps down to the lower floor and passing through the blast doors there were a further set of steps down to the right which led outside the bunker and into a pre-fabricated lean to corridor (not blast proofed in any way) which led to the generator room. This still housed 2 fully functional (if noisy) generators which were providing the power for our visit to the bunker. Fuel was supplied from the 2 tanks outside.

Retracing our steps we climbed back up the stairs and passed the end of the corridor and went through a blast door into a room with a substantial black coloured tank which filled almost all of this room. There were a couple of pumps in this room.

We re-entered the bunker and retraced our steps along the corridor to a large hatch in the floor. We lifted the hatch and descended the steel rung ladder into a large cable way (fully lit) which contained a few cables running the length of the bunker.

We returned to the far end of the bunker and descended the steps to the lower floor.



Hope Cove RGHQ - Ventilation plant room

At the bottom of these steps were a few steps leading down to a room that had been used as a workshop and contained a bench grinder machine. Just to the left of this room was the electrical plant and switch room which was fully equipped and in reasonable condition. Going back up the steps we were now at the end of the lower floor corridor.

As with the upper floor all the rooms were off this corridor and the bunker is totally dry and in excellent condition throughout.

Walking along this corridor there were more empty rooms of varying descriptions and about half way along on the left was the heating and venting plant room. This still contained the compressors (which still worked) and a huge amount of plant most of which was serviceable.

On the other side of the corridor were 2 re-enforced doors with heavy duty locks. Going through these doors we enter what was obviously the communications centre. Off one of these rooms were a small set of stairs that led down to a small area that had 2 doors off it. One of these doors led to the former BBC studio and the other to the control room. Both these rooms were stripped but still had some acoustic damping on the walls.

Leaving the studio area and going up the few steps on the opposite side of the small sunken area to those we entered by we come to the BT room. This still had some of the racks left on the wall but was otherwise empty apart from the signs on the doors in red forbidding smoking in this area. At the end of the corridor we climbed the stairs and were back at the main entrance area by the blast doors.

Outside we managed to climb the very rusty ladder to the roof and had a spectacular view of the surrounding area. Externally the bunker is in good condition.

The entire site was fully photographed and documented and by the time you read this report bidding for the site will have closed.

As soon as the fate of the bunker is known we will post an update to the list. Guide price was 50K - 100K and the site was eventually sold for £120,000.

Andrew Smith

Visit to Wawne AAOR

On 16th November 3 Sub Brit Members, Nick Catford, Andrew Smith & Dan McKenzie members visited the former AAOR at Wawne on Humberside.

This is a typical 50's AAOR similar to Mistley and Vange which is now owned by one of the local authorities. It is set in a residential area and despite the appalling weather it proved to be an excellent visit.

The area outside the main blast entrance doors is now fully enclosed and has a standard external door fitted. Entering through this door you meet the main blast door entrance to the bunker on your right. This area is used for storage of gardening equipment.

Entering through the blast doors there are steps down to the lower level immediately to our left and on our right is a window through to what was the reception area when this was in use as an emergency planning centre by the now defunct Humberside CC. Having got the power on and disabled the alarm system we set off to explore and fully photograph the bunker.

In recent times the bunker has been used by the police for training but now it lies empty and unused. We'll start with the top floor.

Turning right from the entrance area you enter the circular corridor which runs around the top floor. The first room on the right is what was the reception office and this now has a number of windows cut into the walls. There is a fair amount of junk strewn around the floor and virtually everything has been removed.

Continuing along the next room on the right was also empty apart from some junk and the remains of some of the EPO files. Moving along the corridor opens out into what was the communications room. Here were a series of individual bays for radio use many still with aerial connections present. On the walls were a number of radio instructions and call sign details. Part of the telephone system was also in this room and although it appeared to be working was in a somewhat sorry state lying on the floor.

Continuing through this room we re-joined the corridor and forked right. This took us to the male toilets and stairs down to the lower level. Backtracking we went past the bottom of the radio room and continued along. Eventually we came to a door which led onto the balcony of the operations room. Whilst the balcony was in tact the curved Perspex panelling had been removed and blocked in within the side rooms. For the most part however this room was in tact and gave us a clear view into the ops room below. Directly behind the balcony was a room which contained a number of charts etc on the wall which had obviously been used as a meeting/ conference room.

Exiting from the other end of the balcony we came to the kitchen which still had some fittings left in it. Another room on the right was locked and we were unable to locate the key. Continuing round the corridor we passed the entrance to the balcony side rooms and turning a left hand corner were back at the reception area.

Let's move downstairs to the lower level.

Descending the stairs by the entrance doors we come to the generator room which still had a generator in place although it was not the original one. We are now at the circular corridor on the lower floor and turning right we come to the filter room which housed much of the air con plant. This was all in tact and the dampers on the intake pipes were still operational. Further along the corridor on the right was the boiler room which still housed the original boiler. Turning sharp left we proceeded down a corridor and on the left came to the old controllers office. This still had a few charts on the wall but was now littered with tables and chairs.

Going through a door adjacent to this office we entered the main ops well. Looking up we could see the balcony where we had just been and the ops room itself was now fitted with a large pull down wall screen and had a number of chairs laid out lecture theatre style.

there were four rooms off this ops room. The first was marked 'Fire Brigade' and this room contained all the original wall boards listing available appliances and officers. One of the boards noted that 'Hornsea Retained 1 appliance 0800 - 1700 Mon/Fri ONLY'. Hornsea is a small town further up the coast which has a part time retained fire station. I am a frequent visitor to Hornsea and know that this is still correct.

Also on the wall in this room was a highly detailed map of the Humberside area behind Perspex marked 'Fire Brigade Use Only'.

The second room was locked and the third was a store room full of various bits of junk left over from the EPD.

The fourth room contained some audio visual equipment including a number of videos, audio cassettes and 16mm films. These proved to be most interesting and included a 16mm film entitled 'Civil Defence in the Soviet Union' and a promotional video from the Tom Butler Organisation. Some of the audio cassettes contained recording of sirens etc. A door in this room led into what was once a projection room and here we discovered a set of photographs showing the various local EPO departments.

Leaving the ops room via the door we came in the next room was the BBC Radio Humberside Studio. Whilst all equipment had been removed the door and soundproofing was still in place and this had a small hatch in it for passing announcements to the presenter. We wee told that this studio was fully equipped at one time.

Continuing along the corridor a door on the right led into the map room. This still contained a huge number of maps and charts relating to the Humberside area. Also in this area were charts relating to the behaviour of buildings during nuclear explosions and illustration of potential damage at various distances from ground zero.

Continuing along the corridor along the back of the bunker we came to the second entrance. Opening the blast doors this now led into a deserted office that had been created by boxing in the exterior blast wall.

Moving along the next room was locked but having found the key we entered to find a number of tables and chairs strewn around together with some broken television sets. On the walls carefully preserved behind Perspex were 2 sets of ROC post cluster maps and a large scale OS map of the area.

The next room was marked 'Military Advisors' and was locked. We were unable to find the key and therefore the contents of this room are unknown. Moving back towards the generator room we pass the second entrance to the ops room and arrive back at the stairs leading up to the entrance.

There was no sign of vandalism or damp within the bunker and in the grounds are 2 large vehicle garages which are currently in use my a medical charity for storage of equipment.

Andrew Smith

Visit to Winchester ROC Group HQ

ROC Group HQ Winchester - WW2 Control Room

On Thursday 18th June 4 members of Subterranea Britannica, Nick Catford, Dan McKenzie, Andre Smith and Tony Page visited the former 14 Group Control at Winchester. It is located at the junction of Abbots Road and Worthy Road a mile north of the city centre.

The surface two storey blockhouse is of concrete construction with an outer cladding of brick. The blockhouse has two doors set into a small recessed entrance at 90 degrees to the main building. The door on the right led to the filter room and the door on the left to the spine corridor that runs the length of the building. The doors are securely locked. Once in the spine corridor the first room on the right is the plant room. The ventilation plant is all still in place and appears to be in good condition. A door in the rear of the room leads into a slightly smaller room containing the standby generator and its control cabinet. Again the generator appears to be in excellent condition. The fuel tank is full, the engine is full of oil so a new battery would probably start it with little difficulty. Next door on the right leads into the well of the control room with its balcony around three sides above. The room is completely empty and the large glass window looking through into the communications centre has been smashed by vandals. The communications centre, with its walls covered with white painted peg board has been stripped. From the back of the communications centre there is a short corridor into the BT Room, this area is damp with mould on the floor. Back in the spine corridor the next door on the left is a store, the back wall has been smashed and you can walk straight through into the BR Room. After a flight of stairs up to the balcony is the main entrance into the BT room. There are some racks still in place, a small filing cabinet and papers strewn all over the floor. Next door on the right leads into the canteen which is empty followed by the kitchen which still retains all of its equipment. There is a serving hatch into the canteen. The corridor then turns right through a two door airlock to the emergency exit. The second door has been nailed shut following a break in through the rear exit after intruders cut their way in.

Returning to the start of the spine corridor, the first room on the left is the decontamination room with its sink still in place and a connecting door through to the dressing room. Then comes the ladies and gents toilets which are intact but not functioning, the officers room, male dormitory and female dormitory all of which are empty. Up the stairs to the balcony the atmosphere becomes very humid. The standard ROC post instruments were mounted up here and their is still a BPI mount on the wall of a small open room at one end of the balcony that once housed a large floor standing light box. The radio room is also at this level at the top of the stairs and this still contains some equipment.

Externally there is a door in a small extension on the lower flat roof which housed the water tanks. The lower section of ladder up to the roof has now been removed. The pump up aerial mast is still in place beside the blockhouse.

The administration block is alongside utilising the former ROC Centre built in 1943. It consists of prefabricated offices around a square two storey brick built ops. room. The building is painted white and is still in reasonable condition externally although it has obviously been broken into on a number of occasions as many of the windows are broken and boarded up. Internally it is a mess with considerable damage and vandalism to most of the rooms. The hub of the complex is the two storey operations room consisting of a well with steps up to a balcony around three sides. This room is painted a very dark blue and was, immediately after closure, used to house the ROC Museum. Unfortunately the museum had to move out at very short notice leaving many of their exhibits behind which have now been wrecked by intruders. There are a number of smashed display cases, a floor standing GPO unit, a GPO teleprinter, a rack of electronic equipment and a box of old GPO headsets. The former air lock to one side of the control room has been turned into a mock underground post with a timer mounted just inside the doorway, a battery lead dangling from the wall and even a recess cut into the floor to simulate the sump. The kitchen still has most of its equipment and there is a damaged floor standing GPO switchboard standing in the men's lavatory. Behind the operations room and only accessible from the outside are the boiler house which is empty apart from the concrete mounting and the ventilation plant room which is still fully equipped.

After closure in 1992 it had been hoped that the centre would permanently house the ROC museum and the local council put in a bid for the site. Unfortunately due to a bureaucratic blunder the site was sold to a lower bidder who had planned to turn the 1943 building, which is Grade 2 listed, into a vets surgery. These plans fell through and the owners now want to develop the whole site for housing but are frustrated by the Grade 2 listing which they are hoping to reverse. They have no plans for the site until after 2002 when the claw back clause imposed on them at the time of the sale becomes void.

Nick Catford 19.5.2000

VISIT TO SUB-REGIONAL WAR ROOM AT SOUTHALL, MIDDLESEX

The postponed visit to the North West Group Control at Southall took place on the 1st July. The visit had originally been scheduled for the 20th May but had to be postponed as the bunker was flooded to a depth of two feet after prolonged torrential rain. Luckily the water level had dropped to its usual 6" and our visit was able to go ahead.

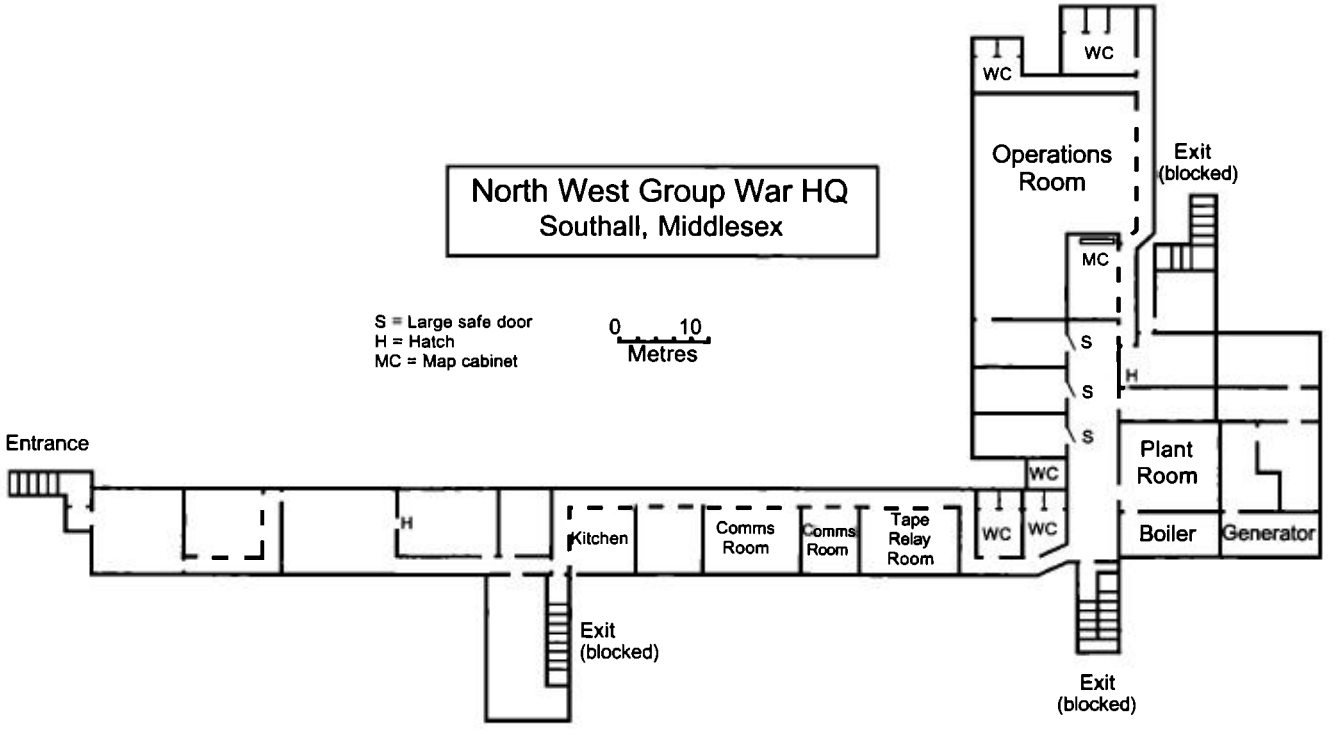
The bunker is located beneath Hanborough Junior & Infants School in South Road, Southall. There were originally four entrances, the only one now accessible is an unobtrusive wooden door on the north side of the main school entrance. The bunker runs west under the school with the operations room and plant rooms under a raised section of the playground behind the school buildings. Two other entrances, now bricked up are clearly visible from the staff car park at the end of Beatrice Road and a forth entrance, also blocked, is in the playground.

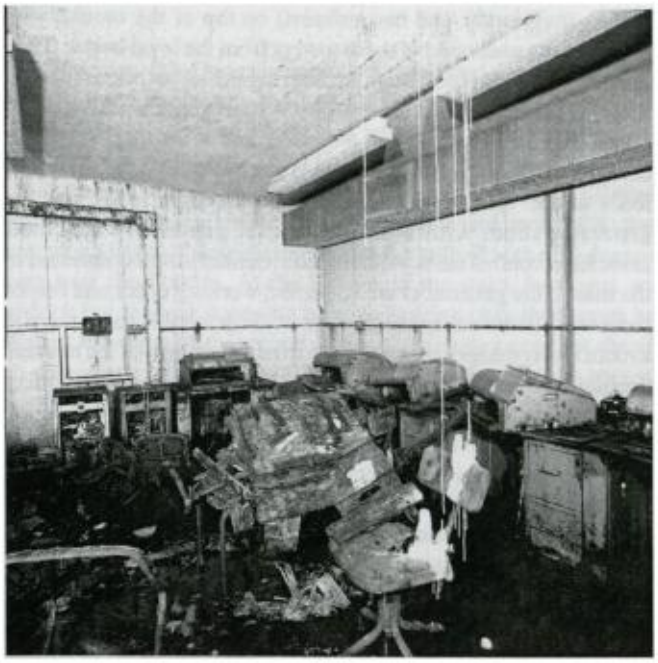
The bunker was built during the 2nd world war and was enlarged and modernised in the 1960's when the network of four regional war rooms in London (Mill Hill, Wanstead, Cheam & Chislehurst) was expanded. Chislehurst closed and was replaced by the bunker under Pear Tree House, a block of council flats in Lunham Road, S.E.19, Wanstead and Cheam were retained. Mill Hill was also retained as the new North Group HQ while Southall was modernised to take on the role of the now reduced North West Group 'Group War HQ' (Control 51E). It also housed Ealing Council's emergency control centre.

It is unclear when it was abandoned. From the evidence below ground it certainly took a part in the 'Square Leg' home defence exercise in 1980 but there is no evidence that it took place in 'Hard Rock' two years later. By the time the school was built in 1983 it had definitely closed. It seems likely that that the building of the school damaged the fabric of the building and may be responsible for the current water ingress although it was known to have a water problem while still operational.

Today, it is difficult to put a definite use to all the rooms as the bunker is in appalling and dangerous internal condition. Everything is wet and most internal doors and partition walls have rotted away. The little paperwork that survives is sodden and virtually impossible to read. A lot however still remains giving much evidence of its former use. Rotting timber under water can give off Hydrogen Sulphide gas when disturbed with it's characteristic bad eggs smell. Hydrogen Sulphide is highly toxic and can be lethal and nobody should enter the bunker without being aware of the implications. We smelt the gas in a number of the rooms and made a hasty retreat until it had dissipated.

Going through the wooden entrance door a short flight of steps leads to a corridor at right angles which opens into the first room. From this point onwards, the bunker is always flooded at least to a depth of six inches. The first room leads into a further three rooms in line. All of them are filled with rubbish, most of it demolished partition walls and it's impossible to ascertain their former function. After the forth room there is a cable entry on the right and a flight of steps up to one of the sealed entrances, there is a power distribution panel on the left. Beyond this is the kitchen with only a domestic sink and draining board remaining. Three further rooms follow in line with a corridor along the left hand side. The partition wall between the corridor and the rooms has fallen away. Beyond the kitchen is the communications room but again the partition wall between the two has gone. All the remains in the comms. room is some electrical racks. There is a solid wall between the comms. room and a second comms. room which still contains a number of coaxial cables and two teleprinter tables. There was a partition wall still in place between this and the forth room but when I touched it gently half of it collapsed.





Southall Group War Room - Tape Relay Room

The next room is probably the most interesting in the bunker. Its door still stands although the walls around it have gone. There is a sign on the door which says 'Tape Relay Room'. It still contains teleprinter tables along two sides with the teleprinter cases still in place, each sporting a GPO badge. Each teleprinter is labelled, Hounslow, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow, Brent, Kensington & Chelsea, Hillingdon, (the sub-regions of Nortrh West Group) Q Met and two labelled UKWMO. There are also a number of chairs and a floor standing test jack and patching frame which also includes a number of valve amplifiers with their valves still in place. Passing out of this room their is a double dog leg in the corridor which gives access to male a female toilets. Although most of the taps have seized solid, a few still turn and it would appear that the water supply is still connected.

The dog leg opens into a wide north-south corridor approximately 60 feet long. To the right a doorway leads to a flight of steps to one of the sealed entrances and diagonally opposite is the entrance to the plant rooms. The first room contains the ventilation and filtration plant which is all intact apart from the vertical filters which have been removed. Their mountings on the floor and ceiling are still in place. There are two doorways out of the ventilation plant room, one leads to the boiler room which has a small oil fired boiler in one corner with a number of dials on the wall indicating litres. A doorway out of this room has been bricked up but one brick has been removed to reveal earth infill behind. This was probably the position of the fuel tanks for the boiler. The other doorway out of the ventilation plant room leads into two small rooms, one of which gives access to the generator room. The generator is still in situ.

Returning to the wide corridor on the opposite wall there is another toilet followed by three doorways which still retain three heavy man sized 'safe' style doors. Two of these probably led into secure storage rooms which still contain filing cabinets (with their keys rusted in place) and cupboards. There are stocks of leaflets relating to flooding, a packet of GLC headed notepaper, some papers relating to exercise 'Square Leg', a number of empty GLC War Emergency Plan files, some furniture and a duplicator. The third room with a safe door has another doorway at the far end that leads into the large 'L' shaped operations room. Much of the furniture (desks and chairs) still survives although again the partition walls along one of the sides has largely fallen away.

From the end of the wide corridor one doorway leads to a flight of stairs up to one of the blocked entrances and another leads to another block of male and female toilets. In an alcove on the left hand side of the corridor to the toilets there is a large floor standing metal map cabinet but alas no maps in it.

All the major rooms were photographed and a rough paced survey made which will be published in a future Sub Brit newsletter. Those present were John Lawal (who arranged the visit), Nick Catford, Tony Page, Andrew Smith, Robin Ware, Keith Ward, Roger Cleever and Pete Walker, all members of Subterranea Britannica.

Nick Catford 1.7.2000

Visit to Skendleby RGHQ 3.1

On the 18th November, five members of Subterranea Britannica were able to visit the former Rotor station and RGHQ at Skendleby in Lincolnshire. It has recently been announced that the bunker is up for sale but our visit was arranged thanks to a chance meeting in a shop between the owner and Sub Brit member Paul Charlton. Those present were Nick Catford, Dan McKenzie, Andrew Smith, Paul Charlton and Richard McLachlan. It was arranged that we should meet at the owners house a few miles away, Richard & Paul arriving there by helicopter. Having met the owner, a local businessman, we travelled in convoy the ten miles to the bunker.

RAF Skendleby first became operational in 1943 as a Chain Home Low radar station but only remained in use for two years. In the 1950's the site was chosen for one of the R3 GCI (Ground Control Intercept) Stations as part of the Rotor Project, coming on line in July 1953. With the demise of the rotor project the bunker saw a new lease of life as SRHQ in the mid 1960's and following a major rebuild in 1985 when two extra floors were added it was re-designated RGHQ 3.1 for the East Midlands region.

As a standard Rotor R3 it was a two level underground bunker with a surface bungalow style guardhouse. During the 1985 rebuild a third floor was added between the original two floors. This was possible because there was considerable space under the two floors for cables, ventilation ducting etc, in fact there was a man sized walkway below the upper corridor. By removing this space which was not required for its new role it was possible to squeeze in a third level, albeit with a lower ceiling. A small forth level, in reality at ground level, was added on top of the bunker and mounded over with soil. The bunker is within a securely fenced compound recently planted with new trees in places. The original lattice aerial mast still stands in its own locked compound behind the guardhouse. There is an emergency exit to the rear of the bunker on the north side and a third entrance into the generator room in the centre of the north side of the mound. Outside the main compound one building remains from the 1940's.

For our visit, we entered through the bungalow which is located alongside the road. The bungalow is of the standard design with

its veranda fronting onto the road and an extension at the back that housed the stairwell and goods entrance fitted with heavy blast doors. There is one small room on the south side of the bungalow with boarded up windows but this room gives no access to the rest of the guardhouse or the bunker. All the other windows are painted on and the only access is through the heavy steel front door or the rear goods doors. The owner explained that somebody tried to break in through the roof on one occasions but was thwarted by the real flat concrete roof below. Inside the bungalow there is a small office with a window on the left and the decontamination room now stripped out on the right. The fuel pumps (one manual and one electric) are also located here. From the short corridor a doorway leads through to the extension and the stairwell where there is a 5 ton electric hoist fixed to the ceiling above the well; this is still in good working order.

We descended the stairs and down the sloping passage into the bunker. After 20 yards the passage turnes sharply to the left and continues downhill for a further 50 yards to a heavy blast door. Just before this door on the left is a large 11Kv mains transformer and its associated control cabinet mounted behind a metal grille. At the end of the slope a section of original teak flooring remains in place with trap doors down to the cable tunnels below. Having passed through the blast doors there is a dog leg in the passage which leads into the upper corridor of the third floor (the original top or second floor; this corridor is still in its original position. On the right is the main stairwell down to the two lower floors with another hoist in good working order. All the rooms in the bunker still have their most recent function printed on a metal plate on each door. Most of the rooms on the right hand side of this corridor are still in the same positions as they were in rotor days although, like most of the rooms in the bunker, they have all been completely stripped of fittings and furniture. It is still possible to make out the position of the small kitchen on this side although the internal walls have been removed and the doorway has been bricked up. The layout of the rooms on the left hand side of the corridor has completely changed. There are now a number of short corridors on the left hand side, the first leads to the communications room which still contains some wiring and part of a mounting frame on the ceiling. Beyond this is the BBC office with a window through into the BBC studio with its walls covered with acoustic tiles. Both these rooms are completely empty. Amongst the rooms accessed from the next corridor on the left is the BT room. It is obvious from the marks on the floor that this was a fairly large telephone exchange and some of the wiring and the main distribution frame with its panels is still in place on one wall. The only telephone in the building is on the floor here and it is still working, "It's just in case somebody gets locked in" explained the owner. The next room on the left down the main corridor is described as the 'Counter Room' and sure enough behind the door there is a counter with a glassless window into the room beyond which, judging by the remaining wires and plugs is the telex or teleprinter room. Within that room is a small cabin with glass windows. This is described as the MSX room with a patch panel on the wall linking to various towns and cities, Nottingham and Derby were included together with various AFHQ's. The final room on the left hand side of the main corridor is a large open plan office. At the end of the corridor there is a wooden doorway to the right which leads to the emergency exit stairway, the second stairway down to the lower levels and through a door, to the stairway up to the top or forth level.

The top level is not underground but built on the surface and mounded over with soil and grassed. There are four ventilation towers (two intake and two exhaust) on top of the mound with access to the underside of these towers from the level below. They contain banks charcoal filters for filtering the air before circulating it round the bunker. At the top of the stairs there is also a small decontamination room with a shower and a disposal chute for contaminated clothes, beyond this is a heavy steel door to the left leads to the ventilation towers and to the right leads into the generator room with two large diesel generators and their associated control units. Although the bunker is still connected to the mains, the generators are in perfect working order and one of them was started easily. At the rear of the generator room there is a room that contains a number of horizontal fans, part of the bunkers ventilation system. On the far side of this room is an external steel door leading through the side of the surface mound, hence the decontamination room on this level. This appears to be a weak point as the steel is not thick and the blast protection not great. The locked door between this area and the decontamination room is however more substantial. At this level there is also a fuel tank room and the tanks are almost full.

Returning to the third level descended the rear stairway to the new middle or second level. At this point we noticed that the paintwork on each level is a different colour (3rd floor cream, 2nd floor green, 1st floor red) and there is a sign on the wall by the stairway indicating which floor it is. The middle floor has the longest corridor running the full length of the bunker. There are only a few rooms on this level, mainly on the north side. The first room is the kitchen and an adjacent store room. Everything in the kitchen and serving area is of stainless steel including counter, cookers, sinks, hot plates, hot water dispensers and heated containers for the pre cooked food and all appears in good working order. On the other side of the serving counter is the spacious canteen with pillars supporting the roof. The rest of this side of the corridor consists of a very large 'L' shaped open plan office, again with a number of supporting pillars. This would have housed the various government agencies. On the other side of the corridor is a small engineers room, the only room in the bunker that appears to be much as it was when the bunker was vacated. It contains tables and chairs and a large se of map draws still containing plans of all the plant throughout the bunker. There are also floor plans of the bunker plant logs and other papers lying about. It seems likely that this room was left intact as the bunker was sold with its plant in working order and any future purchaser might require these papers. I remember at Hope Cove the equivalent room remained intact with plans still in place.

We descended the stairs to the first or ground floor. Again rooms on the left (north) side of the corridor have changed out of all recognition from the original rotor bunker. The radar office, main two level control room and intercept cabins were originally on this side of the corridor at this level but now it is the dormitories, all empty rooms. On the right hand side of the corridor is the main air conditioning plant and switchgear room. All the ventilation and filtration equipment and large bank of control cabinets date from 1985 when the bunker was rebuilt and although not kept running are in good working order and started up when we pressed the appropriate buttons. A small room beyond the plant room is called the 'Ejector Room' and contains the sewage pumps and compressors. Again this is in good working order and sprung into life when we were in the room. There are male and female toilets on this level and the third level, these are still functioning with the water supply connected.

Nick Catford 26.11.2000

A Plethora of Hackney Bunkers

On Thursday 6th December 2000, Keith Ward joined me on a visit to three bunkers in the London Borough of Hackney, two dating from the Second World War and the third from 1953. Our first visit was to Hackney Town Hall where there is a small concrete entrance blockhouse in one corner of the car park off Hillman Street E8. There is a locked gate on each side and once inside the entrance a flight of steps descends into the ground with a 90-degree turn near the bottom. At the bottom of the stairs there was an airlock but the two doors are missing leaving only the frames in place. Once through the second doorway the bunker stretches ahead in an easterly direction for 23 metres. It consists of four rooms with an open corridor along the south wall linking them. A fifth roof, containing toilet cubicles is accessed from one of these rooms.

The first room on the left is the ventilation and filtration plant room, which is largely intact and unaltered since the bunker, was constructed in 1939. There are two banks of filters made by Sutcliffe & Speakman (dated 1939) and other items of ventilation plant and ducting. Printed operating instructions are fixed to the rear of one of the filtration units. Ventilation ducting runs along the top of the north wall of the bunker from here.

In the event of a power failure them pumps can be manually operated by pedal power with three purpose built 'bicycle' type frames mounted on concrete plinths, two at the front of the room side by side and the third at the rear. The rear 'bicycle' still retains its seat and drive chain.

The second room on the left has no original fittings other than a rack of wooden cupboards along the back wall. A doorway in the sidewall gives access to the toilets, which are located in four separate cubicles to the rear of the plant room. Two of the cubicles still contain 'elsan' style chemical toilets. The third room on the left has no original fittings and its original purpose is unknown.

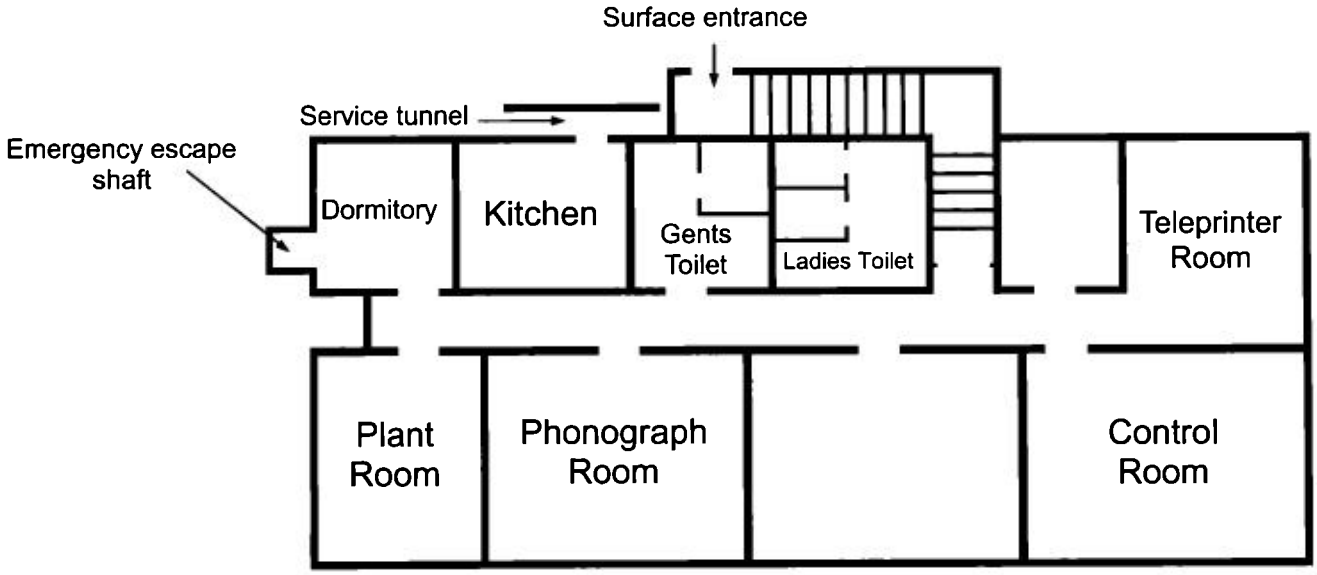
The forth and largest room was the control room and has a wooden table along the south wall and evidence of other tables now removed. Above the table are the words 'Medical Officer of Health' Diagonally opposite the entrance doorway there is a short iron ladder fixed to the wall giving access to the emergency escape 'tube' half way up the wall. After four feet the tube turns to the right where there is a vertical shaft and ladder to a hatch still visible in the car park above. The hatch can only be opened from the inside and is operated by a lever at the bottom of the ladder.

The bunker started life as an ARP control centre and it is unclear if it served any civil defence role post war. It seems likely that it was used as part of the network of regional war rooms. London was divided into 4 (and later 5) regions and if part of this network, Hackney would have been a sub control reporting to North East Group War HQ at Wanstead Flats until 1965 when Hackney & Stoke Newington were merged.

Although the bunker is damp with two inches of water on the floor in places it has had new lighting installed and is used to store surplus furniture and documents.

The second bunker to be visited is in Rossendale Street, Clapton, E5, hidden from the road by some converted civil defence garages. It is semi sunken and forms the basement of a WW2 gas decontamination and cleansing station which now houses a company called Eco-active (Hackney Community Recycling). It is accessed from the front of the building down a flight of five steps to a gas tight door. This forms part of an airlock with the second door also intact. The layout of the bunker is almost identical to Hackney but slightly smaller with three rooms instead of four. The second gas tight door opens into the second room; the first room (plant room) is accessed by doubling back alongside the airlock. The ventilation and filtration plant is similar to that at Hackney and again is manufactured by Sutcliffe & Speakman and dated 1939. There are two 'bicycle' type frames mounted on a concrete plinth just inside the doorway.

At the rear of the second room is a doorway leading into the toilet area, which is again located behind the plant room. All the cubicles have been removed leaving a bare rectangular room. The third



Hackney Sub Control 51B5
Stoke Newington Town Hall

and largest room is the control room and this contains several items from the war including a messenger's bicycle, a canvas stretcher, a metal mesh stretcher, a gas mask and a large electric siren. In the corner diagonally opposite the entrance doorway is a ladder fixed to the wall with an emergency escape hatch half way up the wall. Its original door is still in place and locked. The surface hatch is visible in the yard to the rear of the decontamination centre.

The bunker is without power and is damp with water on the floor in places. Apart from the original artefacts and some rubbish it is empty and unused. In 1988 there were plans to restore the bunker and there was a public open day but since then its condition has deteriorated. As with Hackney the bunker started life as an ARP control centre and there is a black plaque on the side of the building detailing this use. It is unclear what if any role it played in civil defence post war.

A property developer has recently purchased the site from the council and although the building has local listing its future is unclear.

The third bunker at the rear of Stoke Newington Town Hall (rear access from Lordship Terrace). It's entrance is hidden between two buildings, one of them a portable two storey building that now stands on top of the bunker. The entrance is similar to Hackney consisting of a small surface concrete blockhouse with a single door giving access to a stairway, which turns 90 degrees at the bottom into the bunker. This bunker was probably built in 1953 as part of the network of Emergency War Rooms and although some papers found in the bunker give it the designation Sub Control 42, Duncan Campbell lists it in War Plan UK as Control 51B5 reporting to the North East Group War Room at Wanstead Flats.

The entrance stairway enters the bunker one-third along the main east -west spine corridor which gives access to rooms on both sides. Starting with the north side of the corridor the first and largest room has 'Control & Information' on the door and on one wall there is a rectangular blackboard with painted heading 'Display board' and columns 'Date' and 'To be seen by ' In the east side wall there is a large sliding message passing window into the next room, there is also a separate doorway into the next room alongside. The purpose of this room is unclear but it too has a large sliding message passing window into the communications room beyond. This room has acoustic booths along two walls, which would have contained the links to the various agencies. Many of the wooden drawers still contain Civil Defence message pads and Evacuation Warrants. Several copies of 'Operational Orders for Civil Defence Exercises' have recently been removed for safekeeping. One of these orders contained a reference to Sub Group 42 and listed staff involved in the exercises.

The final room on the north side is the plant room containing both the standby generator and the ventilation and filtration plant and electrical switchgear. The Ventilation plant is by Woods of Colchester. It consists of two fans, one connected directly to the fresh air inlet, which is fed through filters to ducting around the bunker. The outlet is adjacent to the entrance blockhouse. The generator is dated 1953. There are also two metal-framed bunk bends in the plant room (presumably not their original position). There is an original sign in the corridor outside the plant room which reads 'In case of fire in plant room 1 Put power switch painted red in off position wearing special gloves provided 2 Use Pyrebe P1 Extinguisher and sand for electrical fires 3 Use Phomeni extinguisher and sand for oil fires'.

On the south side of the spine corridor the rooms are from east to west: The dormitory, this still contains two metal framed bunk beds and at floor level alongside the entrance tunnel to the emergency escape shaft. The next room is the kitchen, which still contains a sink (now lying on the floor) and a water heater. There is a large opening at floor level into some pipe tunnels running the length of the bunker. The next room is the gent's toilet with two urinals, wash basin and a water heater and a WC in a cubicle, adjacent to this is the ladies toilet with wash basin, water heater and two WC's in cubicles. Beyond the toilets are the stairs up to the surface, a small room of unknown purpose with the final room being the teleprinter room. This still contains two teleprinter tables identical to those found at the Southall (North West Group Bunker) unlike Southall which just had GPO Teleprinter cases, the cases here have their teleprinters in them with heavy power supply unit on the floor under each table. There is also a rack mounted electrical cabinet labelled S + DX FM Telegraph System. Although this equipment is rather tatty it all appears to be complete and the council might be prepared to donate it to a relevant museum. At Southall the equivalent room is called the 'Tape Relay Room',

The bunker has recently had new electrical lighting installed and is bone dry throughout. It is used to store redundant computer hardware pending disposal. Although the entrance design is similar to the WW2 bunker at Hackney it seems likely that this bunker was constructed post war although the blast protection at the entrance seems minimal with only a wooden door and there is even a ventilation hatch in the door at the bottom of the stairs. In the larger rooms brick pillars have recently been constructed to take the weight of the buildings above. All but one of the internal wooden doors have been removed.

I would like to thank Andy Wells for arranging the visits and accompanying us to all three bunkers. You will find some pictures of the Stoke Newington bunker on Andy's web site at http://homepages.tesco.net/~andywells/index.htm

Nick Catford 7.12.2000

Plethora of Hackney bunkers

Amazing. What else is out there, and what info is still tucked away in drawers and cupboards? Sub Group 42 probably relates to Sub Region 42. In the early 60s London was carved up between the neighbouring regions. Region 4 being East. The North East London boroughs were absorbed into this. Certainly in 1965 Hackney was reporting to SRC42 at Kelvedon Hatch. The 51B5 designation relates to when London was re-invented as a war time region (5). The 5 London Groups were re-instated and designated by letters going clockwise.

Tape Relay centres were only used as intermediary communications nodes for sending telegraph messages (pre-MSX, which did the job automatically). If one place eg Hackney wanted to send a message to a neighbouring control it would not have had a direct line. Instead all lines would go to a Tape Relay Centre eg at Wanstead. The message would clatter out of a teleprinter as a punched paper tape (the holes punched out were called "chads" and were probably collected so they could be counted in the next US election ;-)). The paper tape would then be fed into a sending teleprinter connected to the private wire connected to the teleprinter in the receiving control. If the receiving control was connected to another Tape Relay Centre eg Mill Hill, Wanstead would have sent it to it and then Mill Hill would send it on. It was obviously very slow. The acoustic panelling may have been in the "Phonograph Room" where incoming phone messages were written down (most controls did not have internal phone extensions at this time).

Steve

A BIT OF BACKBONE

When Peter Laurie wrote his groundbreaking book "Beneath the City Streets" in 1970 he put a lot of emphasis on the "Backbone" microwave relay system suggesting that one of its main purposes was to link various "secret sites". Some files released at the Public Record Office, oddly originating from The Countryside Commission throw some light on this system and show that Laurie's speculations were, perhaps unfortunately, very wide of the mark.

Backbone was referred to indirectly in the 1955 defence White Paper, which said "The maintenance of communications would be vital, not only to meet the operational needs of the services and civil defence but also to make possible the organisation of supplies and movement, and to disseminate essential information. The Post Office are therefore planning to build up a special network, both by cable and radio designed to maintain long distance communications in the event of attack." The most visible part of this system was to be a chain of microwave relay towers stretching from the south of England north into Scotland. These towers, variously referred to as radio relay stations, radio beam stations and radio stations would provide a point of entry and access for signals along the length of the chain and give access to the normal cable system to take those signals to and from exchanges and ultimately to the telephone or teleprinter of the user.

Planning had started by 1954 which puts the concept well into the A-bomb era and pre-Strath Report when it was assumed that World War 3 would be a re-run of its predecessor and would last months if not years. There would therefore be a need for an increase in carrying capacity for the cable based communications networks both to carry the increased load caused by the war and also to replace damaged circuits.

The plan established by 1956 was for a chain of 11 sites running north – south through the centre of England at Stokenchurch, Charwelton, Coalville(Leics), Pye Green (Cannock, Staffs), Sutton (Macclesfield, Cheshire),Saddleworth (Saddleworth Moor), Hunters Stones (Harrogate), Azeley Tower (Ripon), Richmond and Muggleswick Common (Stanhope). Three further towers were quickly added to take the chain into Scotland at Locherbie (Dumfries), Lowther Hill (Dumfries) and Kirk O'Shatts (Lanarkshire). They were to be a maximum of 35 miles apart.

Many of the northern sites appear to have used existing locations but the southern ones were quite flexible in their location and several sites were considered for the "Chilterns" tower before Stokenchurch was eventually settled on. This suggests that Laurie's idea that they were located at a precise spot to pass a beam over a "secret site" was incorrect. Laurie spent much time speculating that the Backbone towers linked these secret sites but in reality in the mid 1950s there were no such sites. The first purpose built "secret sites", the RSGs did not appear until around 1960 and the Corsham war HQ was not planned until the late 1950s.

Once the system had been conceived construction proceeded at an astonishing slow rate but one that reflects most of the civil defence related building at the time. There were delays caused by the design of the equipment and the masts. The original idea was to use slender concrete towers, which seem to have been preferred by what would today be called the "countryside lobby". Several of the towers were in areas of outstanding natural beauty and all the designs had to be approved by bodies such as the National Parks Commission and many the subject of planning enquiries. Later however lattice steel masts were used. The PRO files suggest that these would have a greater capacity to carry the heavy microwave dishes but there is also mention that concrete was used where it was not technically suitable to use the steel towers. Further delays were caused by difficulties in finding sites and then arranging leases. It took over 5 years to finalise the Stokenchurch tower which by 1962 had become the hub of the system not only anchoring the southern end of the chain but also linking the east-west route which had been added by that time.

In fact, whilst the original impetus was primarily defence orientated it appears that there was always a general purpose in providing civil circuits and even in 1959 it was being announced that the chain would have a capacity of several thousand telephone circuits and a number of channels for BBC and ITV. It seems that the increasing need for civil telephone and TV circuits particularly in connection with the switch to 625 line broadcasting was responsible for the expansion of the tower network beyond the original Backbone scheme and by 1963 36 stations were either built or planned

Steve Fox January 2001

St. Albans Emergency Control Centre

On Tuesday 12th December myself and Keith Ward visited the St Albans Emergency Centre located in the basement of the Council Offices in the city centre. This is a relatively recent bunker constructed when the new Civic Centre was built in 1989 and it replaced an earlier emergency centre in the basement of the magistrates court.

The bunker, which cost £631,000 to build (of which the Government gave a grant of just £30,000) takes up part of the basement of the civic offices and is still in regular use both as an emergency centre and when not required for this purpose the large control room can be partitioned off into three committee rooms. Although only recently built, all the ventilation and filtration plant and the standby generator have already been stripped out and the rooms put to other uses. The ventilation plant room, which also contained the chemical toilets and emergency escape shaft now houses the council's CCTV control centre.

After descending the lift to the basement there is a heavy blast door still in place which is the main entry point into the 'bunker' from a long corridor. The first room is a store which still contains some of the original ventilation ducting. The corridor then turns through 90 degrees past one door into the control room and into the canteen which would also have doubled up as the dormitory. The canteen is still in daily use as is the kitchen beyond which still contains all its original fittings. On the far side of the canteen a door leads into the small communications room which contains a number of transceivers installed by Raynet and the government ECN (Emergency Communications Network) switchboard. At the far end of the canteen another door leads to a corridor running along the rear of the bunker with another door into the control room and two doors on the opposite side into the former ventilation plant room and stand-by generator room. At the end of this corridor is a second blast door leading to the stairs and emergency exit. The corridor then turns through 90 degrees again with two further doors into the control room and a third blast door back into the main basement spine corridor. When first installed the three blast doors alone which are steel frames with mesh and concrete filling cost £11,890.

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